



# Voices & Visions

SPRING 2020

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- COVID-19 Response 2
- Kindness of Our Neighbors
- Flow & Flair 3
- Welcome!
- NYPD/FDNY
- SJU EIRP 4
- Milestones

## From the Executive Director

Dear Family & Advocates,

The last two months have been challenging on many levels, but throughout it all I have been inspired and encouraged by our incredible Special Citizens team of Direct Support Professionals and all our staff on the front lines who have enabled us to remain strong as we respond to the ongoing COVID-19 (coronavirus) crisis.

Please be assured that everything conceivable is being done to make sure your loved ones are safe and healthy throughout this process, and if you haven't reviewed my updates, please visit our website and click on the "Coronavirus Information" link to keep up to date with all that

we're doing to respond to the pandemic.

I could not be prouder of our team who have stepped up consistently despite the high levels of stress and increasing demands being put upon them, and I hope you are comforted knowing that your loved ones are being cared for by our incredibly dedicated staff. Please also be assured that we will continue our aggressive and multifaceted response efforts until we are on the other side of this difficult time.

While we were all disappointed to miss out on some of our regular Autism Acceptance Month activities and events this year (like our annual trip to the United Nations for World Autism

Day), we know that this is all only temporary; and like you surely are, we are looking forward to when we can return a more normal pace of life.

Until then, we will continue to be guided by our mission to provide the highest quality care to each member of the Special Citizens family, and along the way we will strive to find reasons to celebrate and as many ways as possible to continue to usher in brightness, even in these most trying of times.

Thank you, as always, for your support and partnership during this time.



Alex DiMaio, Executive Director

## SPECIAL CITIZENS IN THE NEWS!

NEWS CORONAVIRUS POLITICAL IMPACTS

### 'Sense of urgency': Caring for adults living with autism during coronavirus leaves some feeling forgotten

*"What strikes me most about this crisis is the ordinary amid the extraordinary."*

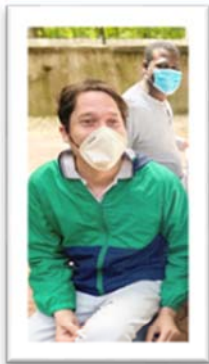


Alex DiMaio, executive director of Special Citizens Futures Unlimited, helps one of his residents to put on a facemask in the Bronx, New York City, on April 14, 2020. Special Citizens Futures Unlimited

ABC National News spotlighted Special Citizens in an article published on April 16, 2020. Aside from reaching millions of ABC's readers, this national news piece showcased Special Citizens exclusively and reported on our ongoing and comprehensive response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Alex DiMaio (Executive Director), David Ryan (Director of Residential Services) and Paul Greenberger (SCFU Resident), were all interviewed for the article. A link to the full story can be found on our website, [www.specialcitizens.org](http://www.specialcitizens.org).

# COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Response & News



## #WeAreEssential



Since early March, Special Citizens has been engaged in a comprehensive response to the coronavirus pandemic. Early on, ample cleaning, sanitizing and other essential household goods were procured by our Management Team to ensure that every Special Citizens resident would have everything they need as we move forward in our response to this crisis.

In addition to an early proactive response, we are extremely fortunate to have an incredible team of nearly 120 front line essential workers who are reporting to work every single day to make sure that every Special Citizens resident remains safe, healthy and in as good of spirits as possible throughout this difficult period of time.

## The Generosity of Our Neighbors

**THANK YOU TO ALL OUR INCREDIBLE ESSENTIAL WORKERS!**

One of brightest spots throughout the experience of grappling with the COVID-19 crisis has been the overwhelming and heartfelt response we've received from some of our neighbors in NYC and the greater NY area. We're incredibly thankful to Olivier Cheng and his catering company, Olivier Cheng Catering & Events for making weekly meal donations and deliveries; as well as to Colonial Benefits and Rudi's Bar & Grill of Long Island for teaming up to make a generous meal donation to Special Citizens on a chilly day in April.

It has been especially heartwarming over the last several weeks to have received over 1,000 donated and delivered meals from Olivier Cheng Catering (OCC). Every Wednesday and Thursday, since early April, dishes from poached salmon, grilled chicken, seared sparerib and even filet mignon have made it to the dinner tables of all of our residences.

A special thank you is due to Mathew Hotta, Staffing & Service Director at OCC, for coordinating and helping to execute this savory endeavor, as well as to our very own, David Ryan (Director of Residential Services) who has dutifully delivered the many donated trays to each of our residences throughout the Bronx & Westchester. We can't thank these generous heroes enough!



Colonial Voluntary Benefits



# Agency Updates & Spotlights

## Flairs of Inspiration



Mykel Dicus, owner & operator of *Flow and Flair By EEC!* has made a vibrant splash into the lives of Special Citizens program participants with his innovative and self-esteem-building program that blends the art of flagging with dance and music.



Katrina Potter, Managing Director of Metro Day-Hab, remarked that “watching our Day-Hab group take part in Mykel’s program has been inspiring; to see the amount of joy and positivity that Mykel brings to our Day-Hab is so in-

spiring.” Potter added that “everyone looks forward to his classes and have the biggest smiles on their faces when he arrives.”



Dicus shared that, “the one thing I find most rewarding in delivering Flow and Flair is how my recreation managers and staff share what a positive impact they see after each class and seeing firsthand, Flow and Flair’s mission of turning ‘I can’t’ into ‘I can,’ come to life.”

While our Day-Hab operations are suspended due to COVID-19, we all can’t wait for Mykel to flow back into our lives with his unique and inspirational flair.

## Thank You!

So many of you in the Special Citizens Community have stepped up in big ways to help in our critical response efforts as we address this crisis. Your support means so much, now more than ever!

If you’d like to contribute to our response efforts, and if you’re in a position to do so, please visit our GoFundMe campaign at the below web address:

[www.gofundme.com/f/covid19-emergency-funding](http://www.gofundme.com/f/covid19-emergency-funding)



## Welcome Clayton!



In January, we welcomed Clayton Landry to the Special Citizens family as our new Behavior Intervention Specialist. Originally from Los Angeles, Clayton made his way to NYC

in 2018 to further his career in the field of human services. Clayton holds a Masters degree in Behavioral Psychology, and has also brought with him an infectious positive personality that has quickly won over Special Citizens residents, and staff alike.

“The most rewarding factor is seeing the smile and eagerness to learn and grow,” said Landry on working directly with SCFU residents and program participants. Asked how COVID-19 has affected him in his day-to-day work, Landry offered that the biggest difficulty has been having to remain indoors, but that he and his colleagues continue to find ways to keep up morale and maintain consistency with all aspects of skill-building.

When he’s not at work, Clayton enjoys hiking, nature and exploring different cultural restaurants. Welcome aboard, Clayton!

## In the Works!



Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic we were at the beginning stages of a partnership with both the NYPD and FDNY to introduce a community-based training model for our residents and program participants. Our vision is to form a collaborative educational experience to familiarize those we support with our local first responders, and to likewise familiarize our community’s first responders with those we support.

We continue to be in touch with Det. Luis Cruz of the NYPD and Fabricio Caro of the FDNY, and once we’re able to, we will resume planning for what’s sure to be an enriching experience for everyone involved.



## St. John's University EIRP



Special Citizens and St. John's University reunited for another successful 'Executives in Residence Program,' (EIRP) where some of St. John's brightest business students break up into teams to tackle different assignments devised by Special Citizens executives in collaboration with SJU EIRP course director, Dr. Christopher Long.

The students were divided into three teams, and over the course of many weeks met via Zoom video calls to ask questions and hone their final project presentations. In years past when SCFU and SJU would collaborate for EIRP, we'd meet in person, but this year that was not able to occur. Despite having

never met in person, we still were able to connect and the students all produced impressive final projects that they presented to SCFU executives on May 7th. We're thankful to our board secretary, Bob Beaudet, the architect of this partnership, that never fails to provide inspirational and successful results. Thank you, Bob, and to St. John's EIRP!

## Milestones by Rozi McAllister



***"Monday's child has learned to tie his bootlace."***

***- Paul McCartney***

Several months ago, as I descended the subway stairs I noticed a cute youngster stopping to tie her shoes. Her older sister realized that little sis was no longer following her lead, turned and went to assist. Younger sister didn't want any help, she proudly tied her shoes and went on her way. As I watched this demonstration of independence, I was struck by the unique way she tied her shoes, but she got the job done and that is all that really mattered. I started thinking about tying one's shoes and how and when did I reach this milestone, then my thoughts went to our men and women and when

did they learn to tie their shoes?

A milestone—a marker of making a significant change, or further growth and development—tying one's shoes is a definite milestone for a child. Experts say that age 5 or 6 is when this usually happens (for those who are neuro-typical).

I decided to ask our men and women when they learned to tie their shoes. I was happily surprised to learn that many of our men and women learned to tie their shoes at 5. Right on 'schedule'. A couple of our people were 6 and another thought he might have been 13, and then there were those who did not have any recollection of when they learned, and who taught them. One man's hand-eye coordination was 'poor' and there was almost a hint of apology, but no need for shame, he was 6, again right on 'time'. One woman spoke about her kindergarten teacher using an aid that many children have learned from, the big colorful flat shoe shaped cardboard with grommets eyelets and laces. She said her kindergarten teacher reviewed shoe tying over and over on this 'shoe' till she got it. Many spoke fondly of their mom and/or dad teaching them. I am proud of our men and women, whether they were 5 or 13, it doesn't matter, despite their developmental obstacles they learned an important skill that continues to serve them throughout their lives.

***We miss seeing you all and can't wait until we can all reunite again. Until then, please stay safe and healthy and check our website and Facebook page for updates on our response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.***

**Have Questions?:** Email us at: [info@specialcitizens.org](mailto:info@specialcitizens.org) — Or, call us at 212-643-2663, ext.126

**Want to Help?:** You can make a contribution to our GoFundMe campaign and help us sustain our supplies of PPE and other crucial areas of our crisis response, to donate visit: [www.gofundme.com/f/covid19-emergency-funding](https://www.gofundme.com/f/covid19-emergency-funding)

**Our Mailing Address:** Special Citizens Futures Unlimited; 1775 Grand Concourse, Suite 802; Bronx, NY 10453