

W I N T E R 2 0 1 8

Voices & Visions

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Dear Friends & Family,

The holidays are a busy time for us all and Special Citizens is no exception. For the past 9 years or more, the Metro Day Hab has held a pre-Thanksgiving feast on the Wednesday before the holiday. There is so much to be thankful for and Special Citizens is particularly thankful for the contributions of the Metro staff, who gave of themselves by cooking and bringing many wonderful dishes enjoyed by the men and women we support and their coworkers. Management pitched in by serving up Daryl's delicious collard greens, Wanda's yummy yams and Rozi's sweet and tart cranberry sauce and few less traditional items, Claudia's taquito's and Felicia's jerk chicken.

Metro Day Hab Director, Katrina Potter brought CJ, Paul, Laura and Victor to the Macy's parade, where they met up with David and later dined at the Brooklyn Diner. The DeClemente residence hosted their own pre-Thanksgiving dinner, welcoming folks from their sister houses; Grace Cavanagh, Fieldston and 261st St., with a few more from Delafield and Faraday.

The Metro Community Habilitation was awarded their 3rd consecutive year grant of \$1,500 from the New York Yankee Stadium Community Benefits Fund. Supervisor, Crystal Deleon is looking forward to hosting, "Christmas Cheer" on December 21st, a great opportunity for staff and individuals to get together and enjoy an evening of fun, laughter, food and gifts.

Holidays are for traditions and the Metro Day Hab will once again hold their annual Christmas concert, on the 20th where the audience will groove to the smooth vocal stylings of the Metro Day Hab chorus.

For the third year in a row, our annual holiday party found the staff and management mixing, mingling and partying with the men and women we support. It is always so much fun to see everyone turned out in their holiday finery, coming together to celebrate as one.

Once again wishes were fulfilled when Charles Herold, Executive Administrator & Development Manager, through his stellar fundraising efforts, made sure that everyone got a little something they wanted. We can't thank those who contributed enough! We are proud to lend Santa a hand when we can.

Our Spectrum Space Day Hab, in Elmsford decked their halls, offices and program rooms, with bows of holly and much more. Not forgetting our person-centered approach, Manger, Christine Carter let the folks decide how they wanted to celebrate. The verdict was: a screening of The Grinch and testing their culinary skills with a chocolate workshop.

Way up north..., no not at Santa's workshop, but our Cortlandt Hills residence, Manager, John Takacs ran down the list of activities: decorating the house, shopping, a trip to see some lights and a holiday dance. Santa may make an appearance.

The staff, management and the men and women who truly put the special in Special Citizens, wish you, our families, friends and advocates, the very happiest of holidays!



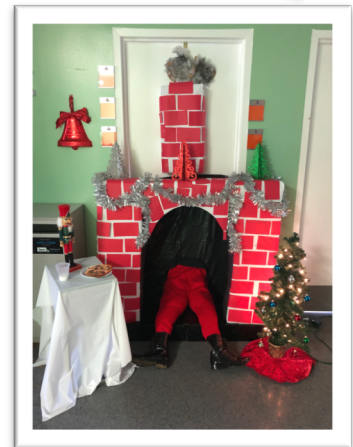
Special Citizens celebrating with family and friends.



Thanksgiving



Holiday Party



Congratulations to Spectrum Space for a prizing winning door!

New Parent/Guardian Forum

We are delighted to announce the introduction of our Parent/Guardian Forum, which will be held quarterly, to give parents a voice within the agency. We welcome parents/guardians to express themselves, whether it is a question, comment or concern. We hope to use the Forum to provide parents and guardians with news and information on any upcoming changes, as well as provide a platform for their input.

The Forum will meet quarterly, with the first meeting scheduled for **Wednesday, January 16th at 6pm, at the Metro Day Hub**. This meeting will address individuals receiving residential services. SCFU staff will participate, providing updates, addressing concerns and sharing joys and challenges, all as part of Special Citizens' commitment to providing comprehensive and integrated services to adults and children with Autism Spectrum Disorders with a compassionate and person-centered approach, to empower them to build lives of independence, inclusion, and productivity. The forum will be spearheaded by LCSW, Stacey Esposito and Clinical Director, Paula Pitterson-Punch.

We also hope to include guest speakers, to provide information and education to parents, guardians and families. Each meeting will recap the previous one, provide follow up and any necessary corrective actions to concerns addressed at prior meetings. We hope the Forum will benefit all: staff, parents, guardians and individuals, alike. We look forward to seeing you there.



Meet Paula Pitterson-Punch

WINTER 2018

Special Citizens is delighted to introduce our new Clinical Director, Paula Pitterson-Punch. Paula comes to us with many years of experience in nursing. She has been a Psychiatric Nurse at Jacobi Medical Center, Assistant Director of Nursing at the Institute of Applied Human Dynamic, and most recently the Director of Nursing at Richmond Community Services. Paula holds a Masters of Science in Nursing from Chamberlain College of Nursing and is currently pursuing her Doctorate. As Clinical Director Paula will oversee all clinical departments and personnel. We sat down with Paula to get to know a little more about her.



When asked what drew her to this field, Paula said it was a girlfriend of hers who was already working in the field, who would frequently talk about how personally rewarding the work was. Paula very eloquently described the field of human services as “triggering you from the heart.” As a result, Paula said she’s never gone the traditional route of nursing but has always been in the area of psychiatric nursing and supporting populations like ours here at Special Citizens.

On what she hopes to accomplish here at the agency, Paula advised that much of her current doctoral education is focused on the balance between services and payment and as such, she is going to focus on ensuring that we get the most “bang for our buck.”

On what she would like family, friends and advocates to know, Paula replied simply that the men and women we support are our first priority. Beyond that she wants everyone to know that she is both accessible and transparent.

On the accomplishments she is most proud of, professionally, Paula is most proud of “being given the honor to work in this environment,” where she can apply all that she has learned. Speaking personally, Paula is most proud of making the most of the opportunities she has been given.

When asked about her distinctive name, Paula laughed and said, “You mean my three P’s,” adding that it was just the luck of the draw, but she’s altogether pleased that it is memorable. We wish Paula the best of luck in her new role!

From the Interim Executive Director

The New Year always makes me reflect about what I want to do better, both personally and professionally. The New Year is a chance to start fresh, a time to set goals or to make significant changes. Sure, we can make resolutions any time of the year, but the change of one year to the next finds me thinking how I can improve myself and the lives of those supported by Special Citizens Futures Unlimited. Although I am confident our supports and services are person-centered and of the highest quality, I am aware there is always room for improvement. It’s because of this that our work is never complete. We cannot become complacent with our outcomes. We must continue to address the wants and needs of each person we support, comply with new and revised mandates from our oversight agencies and embrace our workforce.

A few of the accomplishments of the past year include:

- The opening of a new residence with two apartments, for six young people who aged out of the system.
- The relocation of another residence to better meet the physical needs of four men we support.
- The opening of an ISS for two individuals making great strides in their efforts toward independence.
- The establishing of Day Hab Without Walls at our Metro location.
- Renewed focus on our Clinical and Compliance departments with the hiring of Clinical Director, Paula Pitterson-Punch and Compliance Officer, Dina Hardy.

In 2019, Special Citizens is well positioned and will continue to build upon its’ great legacy, working alongside our Board of Directors, dedicated staff and community partners, in pursuit of our mission. I look forward with great anticipation to the year ahead, meeting and collaboration with advocates, coworkers and most importantly, the people we support.

Happy New Year!

Alex DiMaio,
Interim Executive Director





Khalil is a young man that Special Citizens welcomed in May of this year. In addition to moving into one of our brand-new residences, Khalil also attends our Day Hab program. By way of introduction, Khalil answered a few questions.

When asked how he likes Special Citizens so far, Khalil said "It's good, decent."

When asked about his favorite part about being here, Khalil replied that it was his sense of "independence" and his ability to "do more stuff." He likes his new residence.

When asked what he liked best about the Day Hab, Khalil offered much praise, saying that it is "cool" and that the staff are "very respectful and caring" and that they "look out for people."

When asked what the most fun thing he's gotten to do so far, Khalil simply replied, "Soccer." He went on to explain that he very much enjoys the outdoors and being active.

Khalil's holiday plans include spending time with his friends and family, and hanging out in Manhattan, his "home town."

On his hopes for 2019, Khalil said, "a better life." That's something we can all relate to.

We wish Khalil continued success here at Special Citizens

Year-End Giving

Have you made your year-end gift yet? If you haven't, there's still time to make a meaningful contribution to our 2018 Year-End Campaign. It's easy! Simply go to www.specialcitizens.org/donate and click on the "Donate Now" button. Your special year-end contribution helps us to accomplish so much, including the purchasing of holiday gifts for everyone in our Residential Program! Your gift also helps to offset the many operational costs for all our programs that include weekly groceries, rent and mortgage payments, home improvements, funding for field trips and program outings, and so much more. Please remember to include Special Citizens in your year-end giving, and if you've already made your year-end contribution, please accept our deepest thanks and appreciation.

From all of us here at Special Citizens, we wish you a very happy and healthy holiday season!



Inclusion Matters

You can accomplish by kindness what you cannot by force. – Publilius Syrus

I work with Autistic adults who are labeled "high functioning" and indeed they are, each with special talents, as well. Now and then I work with those who are considered "lower functioning," due to their skills sets and more pronounced maladaptive behaviors. I am pleased when these men and women come to the Instruction Room for a visit. Sometimes it's a pop in visit and sometimes they stay for the better part of the day. There are no objections from staff, but surprisingly, there are some protests from the adults I support on a daily basis. There are times when they don't wish to include our 'visitors'. I have pointed out that everyone has feelings and that they don't have to be best friends with those they don't care for, but they need to be pleasant and welcoming. It is a little bit of an uphill battle, but I don't push, because no one likes to be made to do something. Instead, I prompt discussions where the individuals are asked how they feel when they're in the community and people sometimes ignore them, treat them as less than, stare or walk away. The answer inevitably, is that it is not a good feeling.

Being high functioning comes with its own challenges, as many times these people can 'pass' and be 'normal.' Outsiders cannot possibly realize how important it is to our men and women to be considered 'normal.' I work with an individual who refuses to go on vacations geared towards the Developmentally Disabled, because he doesn't want anyone to find him to be less than or to be associated with people 'who have something wrong with them.' It is heartbreaking to think about. This is why inclusion matters. As our world seems to be more and more polarized, it is good to know that there are mandates in place that ensure our population are included, more than ever, in schools, community activities, etc. Inclusion matters. It helps those who are Developmentally Disabled to become more a part of the world at large. Inclusion matters. It helps the 'normal' people, learn how understanding they are or aren't. If they aren't, hopefully it teaches them to be more so. For my part, I do my best to lead by example and find that at least half the time, it works.

Rosalind McAllister, Pre-Vocational Mentor

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