



Voices & Visions

SUMMER 2020

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- From the Frontlines 2
- Summer Happenings 3
- Poetry Corner: "The Shift" 4
- Quiz for a Cause

From the Executive Director

Dear Family & Advocates,

I hope you and your family remain safe and healthy as you read this newsletter. Each of you have played a critical part, through the sacrifices you have made and the patience you have exhibited; and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your constant support and understanding as we continue our COVID-19 response efforts and work to tackle all the challenges presented to us by the pandemic.

As I have said in past letters and emails to you, we are all eager to return to normal, but the primary concern must always be the health and safety of our residents, and each decision we make as an agency and each precautionary measure we put into place is always done with that guiding principle in mind.

In addition to being immensely thankful for the support and understanding of our families and advocates, I am also very proud of the way our employees and the people we support have handled the unprecedented demands that have been placed upon them, as a result of these most unusual of circumstances. The diligence of our dedicated staff, and the steadfastness and patience of our residents, have combined to create an environment in which we have been able

to operate as efficiently as possible under the circumstances, while continuing to maintain a rate of zero-infection among our residents.

As you know, there continue to be concerns and questions around our pending re-opening strategy, specifically with regards to our site-based day service programs. While we are very much aware of the great need and anticipation to re-open these programs, our priority will always be the safety of the people we support and that of our employees. Please be assured, however, that we are working diligently on our re-opening plans, and are just as eager as you are to open the doors of our day programs once again.

There are numerous risks involved with re-opening a program like ours; one that supports people coming not only from SCFU residences, but also from external provider residences and family homes, over which we have no control. In addition to our lack of ability to monitor situations at external/third-party locations, it will also be a significant challenge to ensure social distancing in a day program like ours. Due to these and countless other risk factors, we are continuing to both gather and analyze a wide breadth of information, but we unfortunately will not be able to

commit to a re-opening date at this time.

This decision is not one easily arrived at, nor is it one I wanted to make. And, beyond our primary health and safety concerns, there are also other more practical implications to consider, including the ongoing fiscal effects of the pandemic, as well as the disruption to the service plans of supported individuals.

I know it has been a tough and difficult time for everyone, but I am confident that—together—we will reach our shared goal of achieving a safe and smart re-opening and as close to a return to normal as possible. As we continue this journey, I encourage you to visit our website regularly, and to reach out to our program managers for the latest information regarding our COVID-19 response and protocols.

We have come so far and accomplished so much over the last several months; and I know that all of our hard work will pay off soon. And, through it all, we will always make the health and safety of your loved ones our number one priority.



Sincerely,
Alex DiMaio,
Executive Director

Perspectives From the Frontlines



#WeAreEssential



Lori Elson, Director of Community Habilitation and Respite Services

In February, when I assumed my new role as Director of Community Habilitation and Respite Services, I knew there would be challenges, but I never imagined one of those challenges would be a global pandemic. Soon after the onset of COVID-19, agency services all but grounded to halt. Life as we all knew it had changed forever, not only for us as providers, but also for the people we support in their everyday lives.

Instead of focusing on the negatives, of which there have been many, I have tried to focus on the positives, including the selflessness I witnessed among my staff and colleagues. Despite the risks to their own health, they pressed on as essential workers and provided the critical care to our residents and program participants. They put on the masks, gloves, sanitized and washed their hands until they were raw; they took subways, trains and forged ahead.

Over this time, many families to whom we provide community habilitation services, made the difficult decision to stop services (we went from providing services to 40 families, to only 12), but some continued to trust in us and our staff, who have given these families the critical support they need, now more than ever. I feel very lucky to work with such amazing people who never gave up hope, even in these most trying of circumstances.

Recently, I have been most encouraged by the return of families who had stopped services following the initial outbreak of cases in New York. Seeing families beginning to return, and knowing they are putting their trust in us during this pandemic, gives me a lot of hope; and it also helps me visualize more clearly, our return to a greater sense of normalcy.



Denise Clarke, Residence Manager

As a Residence Manager working with people with intellectual disabilities, I often look at how COVID-19 has affected my role and impacted the lives of the people we support daily. On top of just dealing with the pandemic, the many unforeseen challenges it has caused has taken an additional toll on everyone. It has forced me to shift my role to be more flexible, take on new roles, and constantly adjust to the impacts caused by the many changes to our residential and workplace norms.

At first, the many new guidelines and safety precaution measures put into place, such as social distancing and wearing face masks, etc., were difficult to incorporate into the daily routines of our residents, for whom routines and schedules are extremely important. But with persistence and patience, and establishing trust in the process we were able to facilitate this incredibly difficult transition for all our residents through visual and verbal reminders and through providing support and assistance. Looking back I am very proud that my team and the residents we support were all able to adapt and ensure everyone was safe, happy, and comfortable; and it's also reassuring in some way to know we can handle whatever challenge might come our way.



Clayton Landry, Behavior Intervention Specialist

Working through COVID-19 has been an experience. The people we support, and those of us providing that support, have all been tested in ways we never could have imagined. We all

have surely felt at least a little nervous and anxious at times, while wondering when things might return to normal, and what that might look like. It has also been challenging at times, especially at the onset, to provide reassurance to the residents who have asked questions that none of us had the answers to, and when we as staff have often been just as confused. I think assisting others in coping through this unfortunate pandemic has in some ways enabled each of us to build an invaluable skill set we didn't even know we had; while also helping us to individually cope with the pandemic and all its ramifications.



David Ryan, Director of Residential Services

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a tremendous challenge for everyone, but especially so for those of us on

the frontlines at SCFU. While it is sometimes difficult to find a silver lining, I suppose what seems most apparent to me, is that of a renewed sense of perseverance. Staff and those we support, alike, have had to dig down deep and find creative ways to hang in there. Absent of any other choice, we are all just getting on with it and soldiering forward. I think there is some comfort to be taken in that.

Summer Happenings

Beating the Heat & Keeping Busy!

From water balloon fights, to cooking & baking, to BBQs, to gardening, and to arts & crafts and so much more, we've been keeping busy at Special Citizens beating the heat and the COVID blues!



Special Citizens Named as a 2020 Grant Recipient!

Earlier this month, we were notified that our small grant application was approved for funds to support virtual programs for our residents, as well as our gardening initiatives throughout our residential locations.

We're very grateful and proud to have been named among this year's small-grant recipients. This also marks the third year in a row that Special Citizens has submitted a successful grant application to The New Yankee Stadium Community Benefits Fund.

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!

We still need your support! 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 by following the below link:

<https://www.gf.me/u/yqhuyh>



The Shift, by SCFU Resident, Adam Lieberman

I am still building, but they shift the ground.
 At most one of my feet can keep on standing.
 While any sympathy that can be found
 Is based on only half an understanding.

Was I building up? They may say no:
 Too stagnant, it was lateral construction.
 I do not find it reasonable, though
 To base futures on merely introduction.

Is future’s future worse than the one past?
 Our arguments might reason only blindly.
 No single minded progression can last
 Among critique whose true focus is kindly.

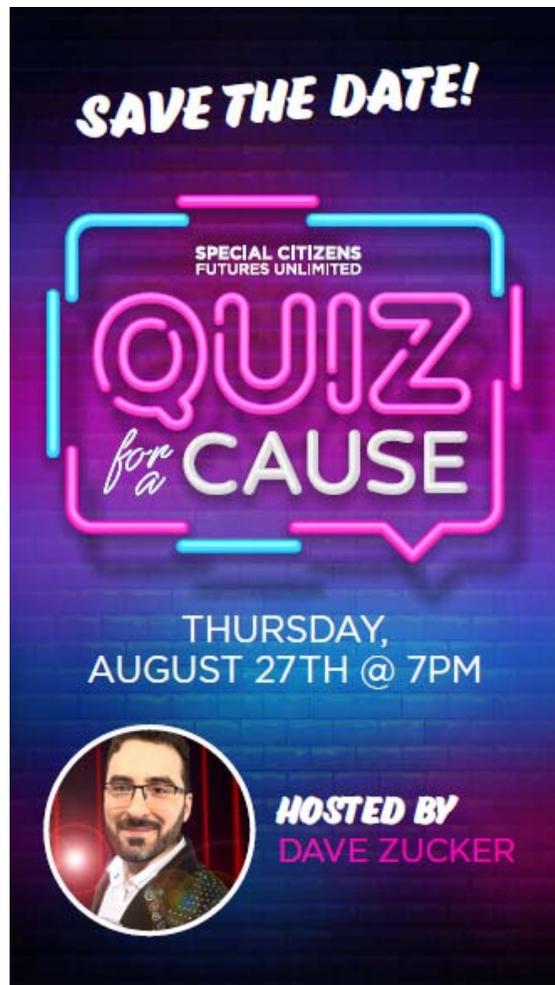
A change in scheme for building may be due;
 My architectural plans were only sketches.
 But is a swap this arbitrary true

As means of choosing which way my life stretches?



Adam Lieberman has been a SCFU resident for 20 years. He holds a degree in computer science from Queens College and is an avid chess player. In pre-COVID times, you could often find Adam in the park or library defeating anyone brave enough to challenge him to a game.

QUIZ FOR A CAUSE!



Join us for a socially-distanced and virtual pub quiz fundraiser from the comfort of your own home! **FREE TO JOIN!**

Our host, Dave Zucker, will challenge your knowledge on a wide range of topics. All proceeds donated during the event will go towards our ongoing COVID-19 efforts and prizes will be awarded to the winner (or winners!) of the quiz.

Email: charles.herold@specialcitizens.org to register and for more information.

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 — 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: <https://www.gf.me/u/yqhuyh>

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