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## Tri County Community Connections

# Youth Success Story



Noah is a young man that, like many of us, has had his share of difficulties in life. Despite the challenges and hardships, Noah manages to maintain a positive attitude. Noah's Care Manager, Katie Lavinia is proud of the progress that Noah has made and the joy and positivity he spreads to everyone that he meets. Noah plays the keyboard in his school band, the Archway Studio Rollers. He wrote the speech below, titled "Autism is a Gift," to his classmates at the Archway Lower School, to encourage them and promote the spread of love and support to others, especially those with disabilities. Tri County CMO is so happy that Noah continues to succeed and feel empowered to support others. Great job, Noah!

***This is Noah Reeder, from the Archway Studio Rollers. Just like anybody, I too have Autism. I am the only person in my family who has Autism. Not my older sister or younger brother, just me. I wanted to write this speech to inspire other people who have Autism, not just me. I can't judge people for their disability, but I can encourage them for who they really are: courageous, fearless, unstoppable, and inspirational. So, just remember: If you feel like you're being made fun of because of your disability like when they say, "Your disability disgusts me," don't listen to them. They're just trying to bully you. Tell your parents about how those people treated you and that you***

***want to teach them a lesson. Tell them, "I have Autism and I'm proud!" Then they'll say, "I'm sorry for teasing you. Your disability is unique. I want to be your friend." There are many boys and girls who have Autism, and it'll pain me to hear that they're being teased and being treated unfairly. If I get treated like dirt, I will try to stand up for myself by saying these words, "I have Autism and I'm proud!" Many people will hear this speech and they'll say, "Now that is a person with a disability that speaks the truth." It tears me apart that people are going to make fun of me for who they think I am, but my message will spread across the USA and people will care for who I am, an Archway Studio Roller musician and a student of Archway Lower School. So remember, someday when I graduate from this program at age 21, I want people to use this quote from my speech,***

*“When you’re feeling down, remember that you’re not alone at Archway.” Thank you so much for your kind support. And as always, I will see you next time. Goodbye!*

## **From the Desk of... James Parauda, CEO**



## **Life's Lessons**

First of all, my heart goes out to any of you that have lost a loved one or friend to COVID-19. Last year at this time I did a reflection of the things the agency accomplished in 2019 and the great things to look forward to in 2020. Many of the great things we anticipated happening either did not occur or were changed given the circumstances of the pandemic. It is easy to look back on the year of 2020 and just wish it disappeared or say what a year to forget. In many respects, that is probably an accurate depiction of the year given the amount of COVID-19 related deaths and the general disruption that took place. The reality is it is a year we will never forget.

However, it does not only have to be remembered for the terrible loss that happened; it is also possible to find the good in all that transpired. The things that were achieved were often done under strenuous conditions and therefore made them extraordinary accomplishments. There were so many heroic and impressive acts to learn from in 2020. There are many teaching moments within the events of the year that should be remembered and should be used as encouragement for our future actions. Doctors and nurses risking their lives to save the lives of others under horrendous conditions, showing their loyalty to the Hippocratic Oath. Teachers completely changing the way they teach to ensure learning continues for students of all ages. These extraordinary and selfless acts show the commitment to their careers and devotion to others.

Our largest crowds of the year were not for music concerts or for sporting events but rather for protests or political gatherings; we also had large amounts of people singing and cheering for healthcare workers. Doves of people from different backgrounds throughout the world standing up to take a stand to change the lives of Black people for the better showed a level of solidarity not seen in fifty years. We experienced a high-profile presidential election in which more Americans voted than in any other election in the history of this country, all during a pandemic. Many of us learned more about the democratic process from start to finish than we ever knew existed. Teaching us the importance of the vote and the power of democracy. These became teaching moments about race, democracy and respect for others.

There were moments of creativity and ingenuity in technology and science that helped us get through these unprecedented times. The creativity used to get work and school done in a different way. The ingenuity needed to set records in creating a vaccine to put an end to the pandemic. Only under these circumstances would we be forced to think outside the box and accomplish things we never thought possible.

Yes, it would be easy to toss 2020 aside but then we would miss the value in these opportunities. In the end, it was an iconic year, one we will never forget. Americans have always come together in times of crisis. We have seen it during wars, natural disasters, and now during a pandemic. There is such an important lesson to learn about overcoming adversity and courageously pursuing a positive outcome when it would be easy to do otherwise. Although 2020 had many negative aspects to it, we prefer to see the silver lining in all its occurrences.

# Gratitude

This holiday season, Tri County Care Management Organization (TCCMO) continued to partner with the United Way of Hunterdon County and the United Way of Northern New Jersey, to gain support, and resources to assist in making holiday wishes come true. Due to COVID-19, the system changed slightly in regards to how TCCMO received donations from United Way NNJ in particular. Donors had the option to ship directly to our agency's main office in Branchburg or drop off at the same location. Upon such drop off and phone calls in planning logistics, we were afforded the opportunity to personally thank those who donated.

On top of the generous donations we received through United Way, we were also gifted donations from private families and were once again included to participate in Target's® Heroes and Helpers program through the Bridgewater Police Department. The Bridgewater PBA also donated a large amount of toys that needed homes!

We are so grateful for the goodness that was shown during this very trying holiday season, not only to our youth and families, but our agency and its continued mission. A very special recognition to all of the Care Managers and Office Support professionals who assisted the Resource Department in receipt, organization, participation and distribution of the gifts!!

Thank YOU!!



United Way of Northern NJ donation from a Girl Scout Troop, 5 youth were shopped for! Donations from within our agency, as well as within our building came in to ensure every requested need was met!



Within agency donations received!



Target Heroes & Helpers supported 4 of our Youth with \$100 gift cards!

Within building donations received!



Bridgewater PBA had toy donations to find homes for and we were able to utilize every last one of them!



HOPE Church blessed 4 local Somerset County families with essentials and gifts!



In partnership with United Way, You Give Goods delivered a pallet full of toys which was donated from community led by EyePoint Pharmaceuticals.

\*Please note that if you need Holiday Assistance next year, reference our TCCMO Resource Net's Holiday Resources button to access and identify the resources in your community as eligibility requirements vary.

# Pride in Partnership



<https://youtu.be/sY3EqE4hTd8>

Prevention Resources, Inc. is the longest-standing prevention agency in Hunterdon County. Since 1971, it has cultivated healthy and drug-free communities by providing evidence-based programs and counseling as well as engaging in policy advocacy and collaboration with community partners. Its mission is to work within communities to encourage prevention of substance use and to foster health and wellness within the individuals, families and communities served through empowering prevention and educational programs.

In achieving our agency goal of focused prevention efforts in the high-risk areas of substance use and suicidal ideation, two programs in particular afford Tri County CMO opportunities for collaboration with Prevention Resources, Inc.-

- The Positive YOUth Initiative is focused on building county-wide capacity to reduce substance misuse among youth age 9-20 years old in Hunterdon County. It also addresses behavioral health disparities impacting the county's at-risk youth and underserved Latino population.
- The Safe Communities Coalition of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties whose mission is to cultivate a safe and healthy community by eliminating drug use, underage drinking and prescription drug abuse.

In a recent collaboration meeting with Prevention Resources leadership, we discussed how we can partner in the areas of substance use prevention, thereby reducing the risk of substance use overdose and the risk of suicide for our agency youth. We are grateful for our partnership and collective efforts in enhancing the health and well-being of all of our tri-county youth.

## Getting to know TCCMO Care Manager Cindy Onstead is

# Recognized as Somerset County's Disability Advocate of the YEAR!!



Somerset County Office on Aging and Disability Services connects seniors, their caregivers and adults with disabilities to the programs and services they need to remain independent and active in their community. Every year, an individual and a community organization is recognized for "outstanding service demonstrating significant impact in meeting the needs of Somerset County citizens with disabilities." Nominations were submitted throughout the county to acknowledge individuals and organizations that exhibit extraordinary dedication to the community being served.

Our very own Care Manager at TCCMO, Cindy Onstead won the individual disability advocate award! Bonnie Brae was also selected as the winner in the organizational category. Cindy has been a Care Manager at TCCMO since July of 2013. According to her supervisor, Jessie Turlik, "Cindy is the greatness of dedication, compassion and genuine care for her youth and families. She truly embodies the mission of the agency in her work. Cindy is a strong, knowledgeable and supportive advocate for the youth in the community and it is apparent in her award that the

youth and families appreciate this dedication to improving their lives. Tri-County CMO is grateful for her skillful commitment to the population we serve." Cindy has also been described by the youth and family she serves as being "a shoulder to cry on and a force of nature as she helped us navigate social service agencies...from interviews, assessments, paperwork, and countless team meetings Cindy was there with a kind and open heart."

We are so proud of Cindy and are so fortunate to have her as an integral part of our organization. Cindy is the epitome of hard work, compassion and advocacy. When asked about what this award means to her, Cindy stated that she is "honored, blessed and humbled in addition to really surprised. I am overwhelmed with gratitude that I am able to make a difference. I love working with the youth and families. By having one person acknowledge the work we do reiterates the importance of our role." We congratulate Cindy again and are honored to work amongst her.

<https://somersetcountynj.new.swagit.com/videos/87674>

Tri County CMO

Tri County ResourceNet

How To Submit A Resource To The Tri County ResourceNet

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Regístrese para futuros boletines

# TCCMO's Growing Greatness

It's just human nature – we tend to notice and comment when things are going wrong, but not when they're going right. Do you tend to openly recognize what's going right during the course of the day, with yourself or your children? As we are quickly approaching the season of love, there is no better time to recognize the greatness that you see in others, and even give yourself a little grace. We often get caught up in our everyday lives and we forget to tell others how much they matter to us and how much we appreciate them. And if our kids feel seen or acknowledged in those positive moments, those moments will be multiplied.



We at Tri County CMO want to challenge you to recognize the greatness around you in any ordinary moment:

- Recognize someone in your family for doing an everyday task, such as completing a chore or helping to make dinner.
- Example: I noticed that you helped to set the table for dinner and that shows me that you care about spending time with your family.
- Be specific – saying “good job” 10 times a day doesn’t hold the same value as providing recognition that is real, authentic and descriptive.

If you'd like to notch up the challenge, recognize yourself for a task that you complete every day. It can be as simple as waking up on time (what qualities does it take to wake up on time?! The season of love is not only about loving others and recognizing their greatness, but it is also about owning your own greatness!

Providing this recognition and staying in the space where things are going right both embody a relational approach called The Nurtured Heart Approach®. If you'd like to learn more about the Nurtured Heart Approach® and different ways that you can recognize the greatness of your family and friends, join us at our next training. Ask your family's Care Manager for details.

[Our Next Youth NHA Training](#)

[Our Next NHA Parent Training](#)

## Community Corner



Alternatives, Inc. provides a variety of services to approximately 500 individuals in Somerset, Middlesex, Hunterdon, Warren, Ocean, Monmouth, Morris, Union and Mercer Counties. The agency was founded in 1979 to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live in community-based settings rather than in institutions. A short time later, the agency expanded to offer similar services to adults with mental illness and substance use diagnoses, in addition to individuals and families who are homeless. These services include housing, case management, day habilitation and supported employment. The agency also provides supported employment services to the deaf and hard of hearing population.

Among the agency's proficiencies is the Community Support Services (CSS) program, which offers assistance to individuals who have mental health diagnoses, are 18 years or older, and are living in Somerset County. Services are provided by a team of Licensed Clinicians and Case Management staff who utilize a person-centered approach to help clients develop individualized goals and services focused on wellness and recovery. Services assist the clients to gain insight into their lives, and to learn ways to achieve enhanced wellness and independence. Alternatives' staff provide services such as clinical counseling, psycho-education, skill building assistance, money management, and linkage to community resources, medical providers, and other mental health services. The CSS program assists clients in achieving the necessary skills to sustain independence, as well as recover from symptoms of mental illness. Services are flexible and can be enhanced as needed or requested. Staff meet with clients in the community, including in their homes or virtually, allowing a more holistic approach. The CSS program bills Medicaid or receives funding from the state so the individuals do not have to pay for their service. CSS can help young adults who are preparing to transition into the adult system of care. Individuals are required to have a mental health diagnosis for program eligibility. However, they can have other diagnoses as well.

For those who require housing, affordable and shared-living options are available in Somerset County. Alternatives is a licensed, accredited and approved Medicaid provider. For more information about the CSS program, please contact Heather Bielefeldt, LAC, Director of Community Relations and Admissions at: [bielefeldth@alternativesinc.org](mailto:bielefeldth@alternativesinc.org).

**Newest Editions & Up to  
Date Events  
check it out @**





## Helping Other People Endure in 2021

The last year has been perhaps one of the most challenging in recent history. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted virtually all areas of life. Many students are now returning to virtual schooling after several weeks of in-person or hybrid programs. As a result, many parents are struggling to juggle work and finances with the need to supervise their children and ensure they are participating in their education. Children do not have as much opportunity to play and interact, and people of all ages are feeling the effects of restricted socialization. Stress is rampant during the holiday season during a good year, and with this particularly stressful year coming to an end soon, many of us are looking for healthy ways to center ourselves and focus on what matters most. Try using these evidence-based stress-reduction practices when things start to feel a little overwhelming:

1. **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Techniques** – CBT is based on the theory that thoughts influence emotions and eventually behavior. You can stop the cycle of negativity by becoming more aware of your thought processes. One way to do this is to keep a **thought log**. Are there “hot thoughts” that tend to put you in a bad frame of mind? Becoming more aware of these thoughts and finding evidence to challenge their accuracy can be helpful in reframing stressful situations more positively.
2. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)** – This technique forces your body to relax, helping to increase feelings of calm and well-being. It is also a good technique to use if you have a hard time falling asleep. Start by breathing in while contracting one muscle group (ex. calves, upper thighs) for 5-10 seconds, then breathing out while you gradually relax those muscles. Allow 10-20 seconds to relax your body before moving onto the next muscle group. Do this in slow succession, working your way up the body one muscle group at a time, until your entire body is relaxed. Visualize the stress leaving your body every time you relax your muscles.
3. **Deep Breathing** – Like PMR, this technique taps into your body’s parasympathetic nervous system. You need to breathe from your diaphragm, rather than your chest. Place your hand over your belly and breathe in deeply through your nose; you should feel your belly rising as you inhale. Breathe in for four counts, hold your breath for seven, and exhale through your mouth for eight. This is known as the **4-7-8 method**, but there are other methods as well. **Ultimately you want to be exhaling through your mouth for longer than you inhale through your nose.** Be cautious when using this technique if you have anxiety; it can lower your heart rate, and breathing differently than you are used to could potentially lead to a panic attack. Start with just a few breaths and see how you feel. Better yet, try with a friend or family member!

4. **Humming** – This is a simple technique that can be done just about anywhere. Humming stimulates the **vagus nerve**, causing the release of oxytocin which helps to relax your body. Singing can have a similar effect. Next time your family is feeling stressed out, try having a family sing-along!

It has been a difficult year and many of us often feel like we have no control over what is happening. These methods are small ways to give you back some of that control and restore peace to your life.

Thought log - <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/thought-record.pdf>

PMR - <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/progressive-muscle-relaxation-script.pdf>

4-7-8 method - <https://www.drweil.com/health-wellness/body-mind-spirit/stress-anxiety/breathing-three-exercises/>

Vagus nerve - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/try-see-it-my-way/202003/sing-in-the-shower-make-friends-your-vagus-nerve>

## TCCMO Celebrates Diversity & Equity



As an agency, Tri County CMO (TCCMO) is committed to working against racism and the oppression of marginalized groups. We acknowledge the systems that keep racial inequities in place and are dedicated to developing internal policies to combat those inequities. Part of our strategy includes giving staff tools to work from an antiracist framework when engaging with families they service and with each other. CMO staff are trained to develop the critical thinking skills needed to enrich the quality of their work and to make families feel valued, heard and understood. We are consistently making ongoing and conscious efforts to resist racist attitudes and provide equitable opportunities for all people on an individual and systemic level. We value all people regardless of race, culture and descent; families who speak any language; families of any make-up; families of all religions and faiths; youth with disabilities; youth of all sexual orientations or of any gender identity. TCCMO remains committed to becoming an antiracist agency and hopes to foster equity for all individuals with whom we interact.



connect to the PDF which outlines the WHY and the HOW.



## Our Board Members

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## How to Get Referred to Tri County CMO

PerformCare can help a parent or guardian connect their child to Children's System of Care services. PerformCare staff are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide assessment and guidance to families facing challenges to their functioning and well-being.

PerformCare / Contracted Systems Administrator (CSA)

1-877-652-7624

<http://www.performcarenj.org/>

<http://www.performcarenj.org/families/index.aspx> (video guide)

PerformCARE®



## How To Submit A Resource To The Tri County ResourceNet

Sign Up For Future Newsletters

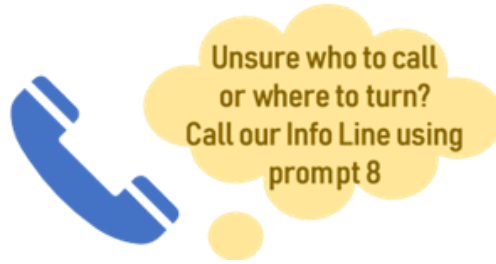
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### **Branchburg Office**

3040 Route 22 West, Suite 210  
Branchburg, NJ 08876  
Phone: (908) 526-3900

### **Washington Office**

315 West Washington Avenue, Suite 1  
Washington, NJ 07882  
Phone: (908) 526-3900



Tri County Care Management Organization | [info@tricountyresourcenet.org](mailto:info@tricountyresourcenet.org) | [tricountyresourcenet.org](http://tricountyresourcenet.org)

