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Volume 7 | Summer 2019

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## Tri County Community Connections

### Building Community & Making Memories



On Monday, June 24th Tri County CMO and the Family Support Organization held our 7th Annual Community Picnic. Close to 700 youth/families, community members, and providers shared a day to enjoy free activities and endless food. Every year the event is marked by perfect weather, laughter and most importantly, community integration.



This year's picnic was no outlier. Attendees indulged in activities such as face painting, swimming, sensory focused arts and crafts, board games, dancing, photo booth pictures, race cars and sports games. We want to thank everyone who participated and contributed to making this such a memorable day.

### Youth Success Story

Sometimes in life, we meet people and just automatically know that they are destined to do great things. That was how it felt meeting Jennifer, who came to CMO very shortly after her sixteenth birthday. It was easy to tell from the first interaction that Jennifer possessed a wisdom beyond her years. She demonstrated endless compassion towards just about everyone except for herself, despite there being a lot about Jennifer to admire. Jennifer is a very gifted dancer, having been involved with the Generations of Dance studio since she was very young. She is also incredibly intelligent, and despite having a challenging year, was able to complete her online schooling program and graduate high school at the age of seventeen. In addition to her therapeutic supports, Jennifer also had the unwavering support

of her family. She considers her mother Diane to be her “rock” and a prime example of unconditional love. When she was ready to accept help from her team, Jennifer began to flourish. She was able to start showing herself the compassion that she so readily showed to others. At the present, Jennifer and her family are adjusting to their new home after a recent move, and Jennifer is planning on working and starting college. She hopes to start her career in childcare, a vocation that is well-suited for her gentle and nurturing personality. She has also been spending more time with her biological family, with whom she reconnected earlier this year with help from Diane. Jennifer left the CMO with even more family than she came in with, a stronger sense of identity, and the tools she needs to take on the next chapter of her life.



*Jennifer at her graduation ceremony, 2019 (Above)*

## Tell Us More About You for a Chance to Win a Gift Card!

Are you part of an agency who provides services to youth enrolled in the Children’s System of Care? Are you a family member of a youth receiving services who had an outstanding experience with a service provider?

**We want to hear from you!!**

Please submit a feature to [info@tricountycmo.org](mailto:info@tricountycmo.org) outlining the work that you do for families or care that you received in Hunterdon, Somerset and/or Warren counties for a chance to be highlighted in one of our upcoming newsletters. If your feature makes it into our newsletter, you will receive a \$25 Visa gift card. We look forward to hearing from you!

## April was Autism Awareness Month...

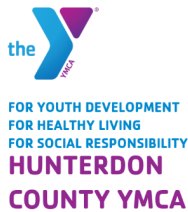
and an important time to shed light on Autism and developmental disabilities (DD). This year, one of our Supervisors helped facilitate our first DD fundraising event here at Tri County CMO. Many staff donated all kinds of yummy homemade food for purchasing. In honor of commemorating Autism Awareness our staff wore **blue**. We plan to use 100% of this money to sponsor an event specific to our DD families and hope to start this tradition as an annual event. The event was a success and we were able to raise \$800. We look forward to making this an annual tradition within our agency and helping spread the word to recognize Autism and developmental disabilities in our community.





## Pride in Partnership

### Hunterdon YMCA and Tri County CMO Youth Development – Keeping Families Strong



The Hunterdon YMCA is one of the largest and oldest not-for-profit community service organizations which works to meet the health and social service needs of 10,000 children and families each year. Their diverse and comprehensive programs promote strong children and families, good health, a solid community and a better world.

Since 2006, Tri County CMO and the Hunterdon YMCA have partnered via the Y's provision of complimentary facility access at both its [Deer Path Park](#) and [Round Valley](#) branches. This has enabled hundreds of our enrolled youth and family members in Hunterdon, Somerset and Warren counties to enjoy the diverse range of health and fitness programs and events available to its membership at no cost – including aftercare eligibility for discounted memberships via the Y's financial assistance program. We and our families are continually grateful for our longstanding Pride in Partnership .

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## Honoring Children's Mental Health Awareness

May was Children's Mental Health Awareness Month. Tri County CMO brought our communities in Hunterdon, Somerset and Warren counties multiple opportunities to reflect on the importance of mental health. We collaborated with youth-serving agencies and partners to offer free educational workshops to our enrolled families as well as the extended community. In Somerset County, we partnered with the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide to offer "Raising Resilient Teens in Challenging Times," a presentation that provided attendees with the tools to engage in difficult conversations with youth and highlight protective factors that reduce the risk of suicide. This presentation was made possible via grant funding provided by The Provident Bank Foundation. Tri County CMO also held two Nurtured Heart Approach Workshops in Hunterdon and Warren Counties in collaboration with Children's Interagency Coordinating Council (CIACC), the Family Support Organization (FSO), Children's Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (CMRSS), and Warren County Department of Human Services. The Nurtured Heart Approach is a modality that the NJ Children's System of Care has adopted as it's been found to build



healthy relationships and decrease challenging behaviors in “intense” children. Each workshop gave attendees opportunities to visit mental health resource providers and learn about additional services available to our counties. It is with our continued collaboration and ongoing relationships with community partners that we excitedly move forward in our efforts to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.

## Save the Date! Nurtured Heart Approach Workshops

Within the upcoming months, Tri County CMO will be hosting 5 additional Nurtured Heart Approach Workshops. Sessions will be presented by our Certified Nurtured Heart Trainers Deja Amos, MSW and Stephanie Suriani, LCSW. Attendees can expect to gain set of strategies that assists children in further developing their self-regulation. The approach focuses on transforming the way children perceive themselves, their caregivers and the world around them. Children learn to understand that they will receive endless amounts of praise, energy, recognition and reward through the positive behavior they display, and this supports children in building a positive portfolio of themselves, which we call “Inner Wealth™.” The workshops are open to the community and refreshments will be provided. Please attend a session most convenient for you! The schedule of workshops is as follows:



| Tri County<br>Care Management Organization<br>3040 Rt. 22 West, Suite 210<br>Branchburg, NJ 08876 | Warren County Library<br>Southwest Branch<br>404 County Road 519<br>Stewartsville, NJ 08865 | East Mountain School Amphitheater<br>Carrier Clinic<br>252 Rt. 601<br>Belle Mead, NJ 08502 |
|---|---|--|
| 7/24/19 • 10:00am-1:30pm<br>11/12/19 • 6:00pm-8:30pm  | 8/13/19 • 10:00am-1:30pm<br>10/22/19 • 6:00pm-8:30pm  | 9/21/19 • 10:00am-1:00pm<br>*co-facilitated by Dina Calu, BS, LPN,<br>Advanced NHA Trainer |

Please RSVP to Stephanie Suriani at (908) 526-3900 x152 or [ssuriani@tricountycmo.org](mailto:ssuriani@tricountycmo.org)

## Photo Contest

Are you a photographer looking to put your art on display? We have an opportunity for you! Tri County CMO is seeking iconic or picturesque photographs to exhibit in our offices. The photographs must have been taken by a TCCMO enrolled family, be of a location in Hunterdon, Somerset or Warren counties and not include any people in the photograph. Photos taken with SLR/digital cameras are preferred. We will be selecting one winner in each county to have their artwork memorialized and receive a prize. Photos can be submitted to your care manager or to [info@tricountycmo.org](mailto:info@tricountycmo.org) (please be sure to include the name of the photographer and location of the photograph with entry).



## Staff Spotlight

It is with great pride that we at Tri County CMO acknowledge our own Tina O'Sullivan for receiving the award of NJ Alliance of Children, Youth and Families: Care Manager of the Year. This award is presented to one care manager throughout the state each year, honoring an individual who has gone above and beyond in the care manager role. Tina has been employed by Tri County CMO for almost four years. In



addition to her role as a Care Manager, she is a Certified Nurtured Heart Approach Trainer, and a member of the Anti-Racism Alliance of NJ. Tina states that what she most enjoys about working with the youth she serves is recognizing and utilizing their strengths. She feels that there is always one likable thing about every person, which can be difficult to recognize when a youth has the most challenging behaviors. She takes pleasure in highlighting that likable thing and transforming it into a functional strength that the youth and family can utilize in making progress towards change. She also states that she finds an important factor of the care manager role is to advocate for youth and teach the youth and those in their life how to navigate service systems to have their family's needs met. When asked about this award, Tina remarked it was an "unexpected, unique experience" to receive recognition for her work and it feels that this type of acknowledgement makes the Children's System of Care feel like a close-knit network of collaborators rather than distant system partners. Congratulations, Tina and thank you for your dedication to the families of Hunterdon, Somerset and Warren Counties.

## Ahlekh Mitchell's Life So Far

"My name is Ahlekh Mitchell. My story is not a crazy one. I was born into a biological family system that was corrupt before I even was a notion. Biological father was a drug dealer, biological mother was a drug user, not a very good combination. So then because of the situation I was in DYFS, six months later me and my biological older brother were adopted to a Caucasian family. Mind you, me and my brother are African American so in some respects it was hard to communicate with other kids of our race, they did not understand the dynamics of a Caucasian house hold. So me and my older brother were struggling with anger management issues at very young ages. When I was two my adopted parents had gotten a divorce so my adopted father moved out. I saw him every Sunday for a number of years but throughout all this time I was still suffering from anger management issues and now depression. Now I'm about seven in this story so bear with me. My brother was put into a residential treatment facility at ten which changed my life a lot because my mom had remarried back in 2007 to my step dad and they had a kid my little brother. Unfortunately a couple more years down the line my anger flared up more than ever but at this rate my mom had tried everything in home, a mentor, cmo, outpatient programs, and private schools. None of them were really effective so I got upset one day and got to the point where I got in a fight with my step dad and police were called to my house. There was nothing else my loving, protecting mother could do. Thus started my journey to acceptance. My first stop was Morris County Shelter. It was kind of tough cause the issue with my step dad was still fresh so my mom really did not call or answer so I felt alone. I got a second juvenile charge there (the first was back with the issue with my step dad) so then I got transfer up to Morris County Detention Center which was extremely hard for me cause my extreme issue with listening to authority. At this time I'm fourteen years old so I was placed in 23 and 1 for my remaining month there and 23 and 1 is 23 hours in your cell a day and 1 for shower and recreational activities. Then I found myself at a program by the name of Carrier Clinic or East Mountain Youth Lodge. My admit date was September 7th, 2015. At this time I am 15 and 1/4 years old. I had a hard time here as well. I felt as if no one respected me my whole time there and struggled in the school they had there. I was getting sent to ISS or in school suspension every day so bad they did not want me in the school anymore, so they sent my work over to the lodge. I had a lot of physical altercations, a lot of fights so then I was discharged from Carrier Clinic on June 2nd, 2017, that's almost two years. Anyway, I went to this group home in Flemington called Boys Hunterdon Youth Services so I started off well but then it just broke down. After a month I started getting upset and breaking things, stealing things so in about three months I got kicked out. September 7th, 2017 I was sent to Bonnie Brae main campus. My first 4 months were a struggle fights running away but at this time is the one defining moment for me and it's my independence. I think I'm ready to be independent by myself so one day over the winter near Christmas I get mad and I run away to New York \$50 in my pocket. So I say to myself I need to find a way to communicate, so I buy phone \$45 dollars gone and as I'm walking back to Penn Station a homeless guy asks if I have any spare money so I go buy him something to eat from McDonald's and now I have nothing. So I wander Penn Station and Time Square for 3 more days hungry, exhausted. In need of a shower didn't eat or sleep for days so what do I do? I don't wallow in self-pity, aww no. I accepted the fact that I wasn't ready, and I couldn't take care of myself. I was not yet independent. So I called the program and told them to come pick me up but like rubbing salt in a wound they did not come. They sent my mother who lives on the opposite side of Jersey. But from that day on at Bonnie Brae, I was a model resident. I was incident and restraint free the remainder of my time there. I also got into the Bonnie Brae Van Hauten Community Home where I got my first two jobs at Blaze Pizza and ShopRite. I'm now enrolled at Raritan Valley Community College. Now I am here at Visions and Pathways doing my best to find a new job and striving to be more independent every day.

***No matter what your situation if you want something, go get it.***

***Believe in yourself and never give up. Life goes on, people change. But what really matters is how much you can change into your ideal self. A special thanks to my cmo Ryan M, thanks for sticking with me all these 5 years."***



*Ahlel (Left) and Ryan (Right)*

## **For Your Information**

August is National Wellness Month! Many of us lose track of how important personal wellness can be. Wellness is a personal practice that encourages us to be and feel like the best version of ourselves. Whether you are a student, professional, parent, or anyone experiencing life stressors, it is necessary to find a method of self-care that works for you. Wellness not only makes us feel better, but ultimately allows us to spread the positivity to the world around us. For some examples of self-care, visit this [link](#).

## **Board Members**

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Walter Dudzinski – Vice Chair, Acting Treasurer  
Erin Karl – Acting Secretary  
Dana Goodman  
Tanya Romasz-McDonald  
Danielle Zurawiecki  
Jennifer Brown



## **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/>

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[tricityresourcenet.org](http://tricityresourcenet.org)

