

# Horizons

A Publication for Seven Hills Foundation  
Affiliates, Friends & Supporters

 **Seven Hills**  
Foundation & Affiliates



**PROJECT FLOURISH: INNOVATION FOR THE  
EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE WORKFORCE**

**SPRING 2025**



# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO



**Dr. Kathleen Jordan**  
President & CEO

Dear Friends,

Welcome to this edition of *Horizons*, a sampling of the life-changing work throughout Seven Hills Foundation & Affiliates. Our community of 4,800 committed and compassionate professionals is championed by a growing corps of supporters who understand that, together, we are moving so many lives toward resilience, health, and happiness.

Seven Hills is only as strong as its community. We, meaning all of us—no matter our background, race, religion, country of origin, or level of ability—earn Seven Hills the uniquely successful reputation of which we are so proud.

In 1953, heroic parents demanded that their children with disabilities, who were shunned in their community, be seen, valued, and embraced. Those parents expanded the scope of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, to people with disabilities. Because of the love of their family members, we see so many people with different abilities woven into the fabric of our communities. Those communities are rich with diversity of all kinds and we are proud to support that diversity. Equity and acceptance for all drives the work of Seven Hills—it is who we are.

Developed by staff members, Seven Hills' Core Values of Respect & Kindness – Integrity – Teamwork – Innovation – Service to Others, guide all we strive to achieve. We believe these Core Values apply to ALL people, including the 16% of the world's population who live with a disability. They apply to our colleagues who represent 58 nations and come from all walks of life and backgrounds. These Values drive our steadfast belief in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, and will continue to drive our work and define our culture—always.

Seven Hills Foundation & Affiliates is in a strong position to support people with significant challenges and contribute to society's collective good. I invite you to celebrate and join our diverse team in

*Answering*  
**the call to care**

Warm regards,



**Dr. Kathleen M. Jordan**  
President & CEO

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## HORIZONS SPRING 2025

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## APPRENTICESHIP MODEL ADDRESSES WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

For more than 135 years, Family Services of Central Massachusetts (FSCM) has served greater Worcester with a commitment to responsive service delivery. A shining example of this is the Project Flourish Child Development Specialist Apprenticeship Program, part of the affiliate's Center for Childcare Careers (CCC).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the early education and care (EEC) industry experienced a workforce crisis with as much as 40% staff turnover each year. Staffing continues to be a challenge throughout the state, putting children on waitlists for care. Project Flourish was launched in 2020 as an innovative solution to the dwindling early education and care workforce pipeline.

Modeled after traditional trade apprenticeships, the program provides entry-level and under-skilled workers, who are paid at or near minimum wage, the opportunity to “earn while they learn” and become certified in the field of early education and care. Participation involves 10.5 months/150 hours of weekly classroom instruction in six competency areas. Concurrently, they receive 2,000 hours of mentor-guided, on-the-job training. Enrollees engage in professional networking and are awarded incentive-based pay increases. A two-phase assessment is conducted post-training to affirm that each apprentice has earned the Child Development Associate® credential.

The impact of Project Flourish is two-fold: ① support workforce development; ② support higher-quality child

care. Early education and care programs are a community cornerstone and essential to local economic stability. These programs provide safe care in a daily learning environment that prepares young children for their school years.

The Webster Head Start program of the Worcester Community Action Council (WCAC) is a Project Flourish apprenticeship employer partner. Sonja Moralez is the Head Start director and knows the dramatic impact that Project Flourish is having on its participants and the local early education and care industry.



***We have seen such wonderful and dedicated new staff come through Project Flourish. Not only does the program directly improve the lives of our students and families, but it provides new careers to people who need extra support.***

—Sonja Moralez

Two staff members at the Webster Head Start shared their experiences as apprentices in Project Flourish:

**Fevian Mehkaiel** was a college graduate with a degree in psychology when she moved from Egypt to the United States in 2015. Her sons attended Webster Head Start, where Fevian stood out as a dedicated and talented parent. The Head Start staff encouraged Fevian to enroll in Project Flourish to become a paid employee while furthering her education. “Believe in yourself,” Fevian’s



husband said. She did and four years later, Fevian is a child development associate (CDA) teacher. She plans to continue her education to become a master's-level counselor with a focus on special needs.

**Kayla Torres** is the new CDA assistant teacher at Webster Head Start after completing Project Flourish's fourth cohort. Kayla was working in the center's housekeeping, when Sonja urged her to enroll in Project Flourish and join their EEC team. "Sonja motivated me, and it's changed my life," Kayla said. Inspired by other Head Start staff who had completed the Project Flourish curriculum, Kayla embraced the "earning while learning" opportunity.

*I am now working on my associate's degree and hope to continue on and earn a bachelor's degree and become an ESL teacher, and after my experience with Project Flourish, I know I can!*  
—Kayla Torres



Kayla Torres, Sonja Moralez, Fevian Mehkael

Project Flourish's progress is also evident in the numbers. Since 2020, 75% of apprenticeship graduates have been retained by employers who serve low-income families using state-subsidized childcare vouchers. In this essential field where staff ratios are critical, Project Flourish is supplying the pipeline with qualified staff, allowing providers to open more classrooms and child care slots. The region is seeing a reduction in waitlists—and parental angst.

Candidates who achieve this internationally recognized credential excel as high-quality educators and providers who plan to open child care businesses. Credentialing is

critical to the competitive edge that improves business viability and sustainability. Family Child Care providers offer affordable, high-quality care, attracting families seeking culturally diverse and responsive programs in neighborhoods throughout Worcester County.

## GRANTING FUNDS TO FLOURISH

- ▶ The **Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)** has awarded three multi-year grants to support Project Flourish to date.
- ▶ The **United Way of Central MA** is supporting newly licensed Spanish-speaking family child care (FCC) educators in a mirror program of FSCM.
- ▶ The **MA Department of EEC**, the **MA Executive Office of Economic Development**, the **City of Worcester**, the **United Way of Back Bay**, the **SEIU Education and Support Fund**, and **Webster 5** are partnering with FSCM to improve access to professional development and FCC business operation. New pilot programming will begin in spring 2025, with FSCM/CCC assuming responsibility for all Central/Western MA initiatives.
- ▶ The **MA Department of EEC** awarded a new infrastructure contract to FSCM to expand apprenticeship services and EEC-endorsed workforce development pathways. As an FCC Intermediary for Central and Western MA, FSCM will manage limited EEC funding streams, and work with EOLWD's Division of Apprentice Standards (DAS) to provide high-quality training, recruitment, and program registration.
- ▶ The **Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts** has awarded a Synergy Initiative grant for FSCM's Family Childcare Success Project. This exciting innovation is designed to remove systemic barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse FCC educators to operate successful, high-quality child care businesses. Specific goals include:
  - An incubator system that supports educators meeting landlord resistance while searching for and securing living space that allows FCC operation.
  - Educational tools and a mediator curriculum to address landlord resistance, and provide systems navigation to stabilize and enhance business practices and overcome barriers to licensure.

# PAIRING MENTAL HEALTH CLINICIANS WITH EDUCATORS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE OUTCOMES



Lynne Flanagan-Tsombakos, LMHC, and Devon Renfro, LMHC, with children in the classroom

Seven Hills Foundation and its affiliates are committed to caring for children of all ages, including the youngest among us. To support our youth holistically, Seven Hills is augmenting and integrating its education services with mental health supports.

Evidence consistently shows that, when mental health services are embedded in early child care and school settings, children strengthen their social-emotional well-being and are better positioned for a healthier, more stable childhood and success throughout their lifetime.



*By modeling positive behaviors, children improve self-regulation and effectively communicate their needs and build important skills for kindergarten and beyond.*

—Lynne Flanagan-Tsombakos, Seven Hills Behavioral Health

**Early Childhood Specialty Counseling** serves children from birth to age 14, and their families, at our Behavioral Health Centers in Worcester, Southbridge, and Milford. Even at a very young age, children who are experiencing emotional distress can exhibit challenging behaviors in their early child care settings. These behaviors can cause disruption, intervention, and suspension or expulsion in extreme cases. Grant funding to prevent suspension and expulsion enables clinicians to provide consultation and training at preschools and child care centers in Central MA.

**Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH)** at Seven Hills Behavioral Health (SHBH) provides clinical consultation to parents, teachers, and administrators at child care sites

throughout Central MA. The program promotes positive attachment relationships between young children and their adult caregivers and educators. ECMH improves the professionals' response to challenging behaviors with concrete strategies for many environments.

The ECMH team is addressing the social and clinical needs of the children at the **Early Learning Center (ELC)** in Worcester. Clinicians train educators and family members to reinforce positive behavior methods in the classroom and at home. "Teachers, parents, and caregivers are getting more tools in their toolbox," said Denise Caron, ELC director, noting the vast expertise and holistic approach of the ECMH staff. The outcomes are quite promising, with data reporting that the children's behavior is improving by 10% or more, which is the goal established by the SHBH clinical team.

Seven Hills' **School-Based Services** provides counseling and consultation for older students in public schools across Central MA. The overall goals are to stabilize youths' mental health to stay on track in school, and provide training and strategies to teachers to ensure the students stay on track academically and emotionally. Referrals come from teachers, counselors, and school administrators. The School-Based Services team also provides consultation, workshops, and training about the impact of mental health on school performance.



## To Learn More: Early Childhood Mental Health

Devon Renfro, LMHC, R-DMT  
508.459.6420 or [drenfro@sevenhills.org](mailto:drenfro@sevenhills.org).





## EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO DIRECT THEIR SUPPORTS

Elders and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) living in Rhode Island can now access Conflict-Free Case Management (CFCM), a new service model funded by the RI Executive Office of Health & Human Services (EOHHS), and managed by Seven Hills Rhode Island (SHRI).

CFCM helps participants access the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) they need and want, and include the following four core components:

- Information Gathering
- Person-Centered Plan Development
- Connecting to Services & Support
- Plan Monitoring & Follow-up

Case managers work with the people supported and/or legal representatives to ensure that their needs are met with convenience and satisfaction.

CFCM is readily available in English and Spanish. Staff can access the Ascentria Language Bank for additional translations, American Sign Language assistance, and Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART).

**To Learn More: Conflict-Free Case Management**  
Seven Hills Rhode Island  
Patricia Lindquist, [plindquist@sevenhills.org](mailto:plindquist@sevenhills.org)

### PROFILES OF PROGRESS

A participant in the Rte @ Home/Shared Living program, Vuthany “Jenny” Douk currently receives CFCM through Seven Hills Rhode Island.

Before CFCM, Jenny struggled to continue mental health counseling after her provider stopped accepting her health insurance. Jenny found it hard to understand her insurance coverage and find a new provider within the network.



During a recent person-centered planning meeting, CFCM staff noticed that the lapse in Jenny’s counseling was affecting her personal growth. The staff prioritized helping Jenny find a counselor that accepted her insurance and conducted telehealth services. With renewed counseling, Jenny is feeling supported and well-informed about her options.

Conflict-Free Case Manager Lisa Provencal notes that Jenny is just one example of how SHRI’s CFCM services can help people navigate the complex healthcare system with confidence.

“*By providing personalized, dedicated support and choices, Seven Hills RI Case Managers make a real difference in the lives of people like Jenny, ensuring that their voices are heard and that they receive the care and services they want and deserve.* —Lisa Provencal, SHRI



# HOME-BASED RESIDENTIAL PILOT

## AN INNOVATIVE ALTERNATIVE TO 24/7 RESIDENTIAL CARE

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is testing the feasibility of Home-Based Residential Supports (HBRS) as an alternative to 24/7 residential services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The HBRS Pilot launched in September 2024, with funding from the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Seven Hills Community Services (SHCS) is operating the program in the central/west region of the state.

The SHCS Pilot has enrolled six adults with I/DD who are managed by a program director leading a multidisciplinary team of direct support professionals, and a nurse, behavioral specialist, and assistive technology expert/family navigator. Participants and their families are offered person-centered supports like navigation, flexible funding, and community engagement that provide a flexible alternative to more restrictive residential placements.

Shannon Stickney, SHCS assistant vice president for the region, ensures the program’s smooth implementation.

**“ We have received positive feedback through continuous communication and regular meetings with families to assess their greatest needs.**

Parents and caregivers can receive training on the evidence-based Safety Care for Families. They also have time to pursue personal interests and connect with family and friends. The HBRS Pilot ensures effective, sustainable support that strives to alleviate family caregiver stress.

The nurse case manager and family navigator fill a critical gap by helping families create healthy meal plans, research meaningful community activities, navigate funding, and identify appropriate assistive technology.

Allison Frykberg, BCBA, completes functional behavioral assessments, develops behavioral support plans, and trains staff and families on reducing challenging behaviors. She notes the importance of clinical integration in HBRS:

**“ Having access to in-home clinical support fills a gap that has been missing with other in-home support models. Families report lower stress levels knowing they have this on-call team that they can count on in supporting their loved one.**



Hannah working with Allison Frykberg

## PROFILES OF PROGRESS

Jonathan and Pat Carey adopted three girls with Down syndrome nearly thirty years ago. For support, they have been using Personal Care Attendant (PCA) hours and Self-Directed services. As the Careys age, they worry about the ongoing stress of hiring staff, completing paperwork, logging time sheets, and not having access to the right staff at the right time.

Daughters Julia and Hannah were accepted into the SHCS HBRS Pilot, and the Careys could not be happier to participate. “It has been a Godsend,” said Jonathan, who explained their desire to keep the girls together and not place them in a traditional group home.

The Careys were most impressed with the expressed goal to eliminate their stress. Jonathan emphasized that he program has made a huge difference in the girls’ behavior, energy, and ability to communicate, and in the way he and Pat feel supported.

The Careys note that the team is always accessible, trains staff, and ensures that support plans are adhered to and updated. The couple looks forward



Hannah & Julia

to watching the program flourish, with the possibility of a vacation and respite time in the near future. In the meantime, they are happy to update SHCS staff on their progress, and we are happy to report it!





## LORI LAJOIE SETS THE COURSE FOR A MAJOR MILESTONE

The 49th Annual Lori Lajoie Charity Golf Tournament played out on another glorious day in August 2024. The Worcester Country Club (WCC) rolled out the carts on its green carpet for the corps of member golfers and their guests to champion the dreams of people with disabilities and significant life challenges in Central Massachusetts.

From the shotgun start to the final putt, the golfers gave it their all. Expectations are always exceeded through the silent auction bidding, live auction action, and Fund-a-Need achievement.

Since its inception in 1975, the visionaries of this exceptional event have passed the torch throughout the decades, building momentum toward a milestone that marks endurance, perseverance, and resounding success: the 50th year of the Lori Lajoie.

The tournament was established as a tribute to WCC's golf pro at the time: Ray Lajoie; his wife, Coco; and their daughter, Lori, who was born with developmental disabilities. The Lajoies wanted the very best care for Lori and they found that care at Seven Hills Foundation.

To date, WCC Members have raised over \$8 million for the benefit of Seven Hills through generous sponsorships, golf, dinner, auctions, and Fund-a-Needs. As we look forward to this year's 50th milestone on August 18, 2025, we reflect on all the people whose lives are forever better because the Members of the Worcester Country Club Answered the Call to Care.







Barre Historical Society & Museum leadership on hand to celebrate 125 years of Stetson School

# CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF EXTRAORDINARY IMPACT

In 1899, Henry Augustus Pevear founded the Stetson Home for Boys in Barre, Massachusetts. Pevear dedicated the Home in memory of his Mother, and established it as an orphanage and commercial dairy farm. The boys in the orphanage received education up to the 8th grade.

By the mid-1950s, the renamed Stetson School joined a nationwide movement that emphasized counseling, psychological evaluation, and treatment for male youth severely impacted by trauma, abuse, abandonment, and poverty. Today, Stetson School is a nationally accredited, Chapter-766 approved Residential and Education Treatment Program for male youth and young men with complex developmental difficulties, chronic mental illness, autism spectrum disorder, and histories of severe trauma.

The Stetson School model uses evidence-based clinical practices to foster empathy and forge a strong alliance between the treatment team, educators, the youth, and their families. The education program follows the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, augmented by industrial arts, vocational training, sports, and recreation. The campus has grown to include the Robinson Educational Center, a spacious dining hall, gymnasium, fitness center, and playground.

Stetson School’s extraordinary impact over its 125-year history would not have been possible without the support of Barre town officials, first responders, and residents.

That support was on full display in October 2024, as the community celebrated Stetson’s 125th anniversary. Seven Hills trustee, W. Robert Bentley, president of the Barre Historical Society & Museum (BHS&M), was joined by colleagues Kay Potter Flick, Eileen Bohigian, James Van Wert, and Lucy Allen. Bentley shared notable milestones that cemented Stetson’s place in Barre history.

Stetson leadership and youth presented the BHS&M with a check for \$5,000 from the Stetson School Community Giving Fund. Created by Stetson youth, the fund is supported through the youths’ voluntarily donations from their allowance. Each year, the youth research, vote for, and award a Barre establishment with the funds raised.

With such longstanding support behind it, Stetson School believes that every child deserves to become confident, productive members of the community. From its secure country setting, Stetson has emerged as a premier provider of therapeutic treatment and education to underscore its belief and achieve its goals.



# TEAM LEADS PEOPLE FROM RECOVERY TO REENTRY

In the fall of 2024, Seven Hills Behavioral Health (SHBH) Southeast secured another three-year contract with the Bristol County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) to deliver Massachusetts' Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) for state prisoners.

The RSAT program "allows state and county correction facilities to reexamine the manner in which they provide substance abuse treatment to both males and females in their custody, with the goal of breaking the cycle of drugs and violence by reducing the demand for, use, and trafficking of illegal drugs." (Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, n.d.)

SHBH has years of experience implementing this critical, evidence-based program with the BCSO. Connie Rocha-Mimoso, director of Community Health Services at SHBH, explains that RSAT is composed of phases that inmates attend, five days a week. Using journaling and other assignments, the inmates gain life skills like greater self-esteem, critical thinking, anger management, understanding healthy relationships, and vocational skills that lead to successful reentry into society.

SHBH staff understands that a person's life experiences and history of trauma influence their health and behavior.

**"We follow the trauma-informed treatment model that focuses on 'What happened to you?' rather than 'What's wrong with you?' This helps people identify their trauma to understand their addiction better. —Connie Rocha-Mimoso**

Connie has worked at Seven Hills for over 30 years. Her team includes an LICSW clinical supervisor, a certified alcoholism counselor, a phlebotomist, and direct care staff who work out of the Bristol County House of Corrections in Dartmouth. Connie leads her team with extensive experience, connecting inmates to care, pre- and post-release.

## CARE DOESN'T STOP AFTER INCARCERATION

SHBH sees the impact of strong connections when former RSAT participants reach out after their release. Rocha-Mimoso notes that returning to the community can be a challenge for many, especially those who have been in and out of the prison system. SHBH drop-in centers are a safe haven for those seeking outside services.



Connie Rocha-Mimoso and  
Bristol County Sheriff, Paul Heroux

**"We coordinate services for people transitioning into the community. Many formerly incarcerated people use our New Bedford, Fall River, and Taunton locations for their continued care. —Connie Rocha-Mimoso**

## HISTORY OF SH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SOUTHEAST

Seven Hills Behavioral Health began its journey over 30 years ago, testing inmates for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections at the height of the HIV epidemic. The SHBH team provided testing in the Ash Street Jail, the oldest jail in Bristol County, established in 1888. Though the HIV+ cases were overwhelming, the team worked tirelessly to connect former inmates to the SHBH client medical program, treatment, housing, and other needs.

At the same time, SHBH began a weekly Women's group that became the "Home of Hope," the first SHBH drop-in center for women. Ten years ago, the program expanded to include male inmates. Meanwhile, the SHBH partnership with the BCSO expanded to include regular attendance at the re-entry and home security stakeholders meetings.



Ash Street Jail, New Bedford, MA

Photo courtesy of JailExchange.com. Used with permission.

# GROWING THE LOVE OF FAMILIES THROUGH ADOPTION

Children's Friend, an affiliate of Seven Hills Foundation, has been providing adoption services in Central Massachusetts since the 1850s. For the past 20+ years, the MA Department of Children and Families (DCF) has turned to Children's Friend Adoption and Family Services to match children with special needs to the open hearts and arms of loving adoptive parents.

Veronica Listerud, LICSW, director of Adoption and Family Services at Children's Friend, explained that all children are considered to have "special needs" when supported through the DCF Adoption Management Services partnership with Children's Friend. Many children have needs that require special care, including medical, developmental, behavioral, or mental health. Many have experienced the trauma of neglect, abuse, and exposure to substance use.

**“ They need the right people ready to welcome them to their home and help them navigate their needs. —Veronica Listerud**

Children's Friend has a steady track record of success in training and growing new families. This year, there is a high demand for people willing and able to commit to embracing a child who needs special attention and care.

The Adoption and Family Services team is managing the increased demand for and complexity of these critical matches. Their tireless work to promote the unique value of adoption and its positive, life-changing impact have been effective in bridging the gap.

**“ We have already exceeded our placements over last year and are on target to finish the fiscal year in June with thirty new successful adoptions. —Veronica Listerud**

Stephanie and Justin had many conversations before becoming parents. "Adopting was important to us; wanting to help kids in need was very important," said Stephanie, a preschool special educator, who understood the needs of many of the children she taught. Stephanie knew she and Justin could make a real difference in children's lives if given the opportunity. They applied to DCF and scheduled a home visit with Veronica from Children's Friend. The next step was to enroll in the Massachusetts Approach to Partnership Parenting (MAPP) training and started their journey.

Stephanie explained that Children's Friend Adoption and Family Services led them through the training to prepare

the couple to become foster parents initially, then eventually adopt. For Stephanie and Justin, the steadfast guidance and encouragement from Children's Friend prepared them well and instilled confidence to move forward.

At the couple's first Adoption Event, they learned about siblings Adriana, age 4, and Jordan, 18 months, and "fell in love." In what they describe as "baptism by fire," their family expanded overnight. They spent the first year with Adriana and Jordan as foster parents, navigating the social-emotional transition. This included using sign language with Jordan to encourage him to communicate.

One year later, when the children became legally available to adopt, there was no doubt in finalizing the new family. Stephanie wants others considering the adoption journey to know what has been truly rewarding:

**“ As tough as it can be at times, it is meaningful to watch your kids happy and thriving and know how close the process has brought us as a couple. —Stephanie**

With Veronica at the helm, the Children's Friend Adoption and Family Services team includes exceptional and



Stephanie, Justin, and their family





Quincy, Seth, and their children

dedicated adoption case managers and family resource workers answering their calling to care. After each extensive—and sometimes exhaustive—review process, the team approach ensures a well-made match.

The case of the LaCours is a prime example of finding the perfect family fit. Quincy and Seth LaCour knew that they wanted to start a family. One night, they went online and came across Children's Friend and their stories of children in need of adoption. Quincy related their emotional connection the stories created:

**“Knowing that so many children didn't have great beginnings made us want to create beautiful endings—so we decided to respond and start our path to foster to adopt.”**  
—Quincy LaCour

With the help of Children's Friend, the couple grew to love the fostering/adoption training process, which was soon put into practice. On a flight home from the West Coast, the LaCours got a call to take two of four siblings, Julian and J'Zaih, who had experienced trauma and needed stability. Quincy reflected, “One month later, we started with both boys in our home, and our extended

family started.” In six months, Children's Friend called to discuss the boys' two younger siblings, Kaylani and Elyjah. When the couple watched the four siblings interact, they decided to become a family of six. Quincy summed it up:

**“These kids have blessed us with their presence. If anyone is considering pre-adoption and adoption, be patient because the road can have bumps and some sleepless nights. But it's all worth the stress when you realize the beautiful family you've become.”** —Quincy LaCour

#### ADOPTION: A LOVING PATHWAY TO GROWING FAMILIES

If you or someone you know is interested in fostering and adoption, contact:

**Veronica Listerud**  
**Director of Adoption and Family Services**  
**508.796.0154, [vlisterud@sevenhills.org](mailto:vlisterud@sevenhills.org)**

The Children's Friend Adoption and Family Services team will guide you through the process and prepare you to foster or adopt a DCF-sponsored child or children with special needs.



# COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAMS FOSTER ACADEMIC AMBITION

For students with low-income backgrounds, pursuing a college education is not the natural progression after high school graduation. Yet, a college degree can make the difference between flourishing from overall well-being and economic stability, or gritting through a lifetime of lower earnings, housing insecurity, and potentially poor health outcomes.

Research consistently shows that the median lifetime earnings for employees with a bachelor's degree are nearly double those achieving a high school diploma at best.<sup>1</sup> Across the nation, more than a quarter of students from low-income backgrounds who enroll in higher education drop out by the end of the second year. Black and Hispanic students achieve a bachelor's degree at rates roughly half that of their white and peers from higher-income backgrounds.<sup>2</sup>

**Bruce Wells Scholars Upward Bound** and **Dynamy John S. Laws Youth Academy** at Seven Hills address these gaps by providing college access services annually for up to 150 first-generation, college-bound Worcester high school students from low-income backgrounds. Both programs provide year-round supports including academic advising, tutoring, leadership and community service opportunities, internships, college tours, and assistance with the financial aid application process.

Bruce Wells Scholars Upward Bound is one of 3,500 federally funded TRiO programs nationwide. For most of the program's 25-year history, Clark University has served as its institutional partner and host site. The Dynamy John S. Laws Youth Academy is fully grant-funded, operating from the Ellsworth Youth and Family Center on Cedar Street in Worcester. Dozens of community organizations collaborate with staff to provide additional opportunities and supports for participating students in both programs.

In their combined 60 years of operation, Upward Bound and Youth Academy boast a nearly universal 100% college acceptance rate of their students. Most students receive multiple scholarships and grants, and graduates have attended some of the most prestigious colleges and universities across New England and the country.

<sup>1</sup> [https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/cew-college-payoff\\_2021-fr.pdf](https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/cew-college-payoff_2021-fr.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pellinstitute.org/the-indicators-of-higher-education-equity-in-the-united-states-2024-50-year-historical-trend-report/>



## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT PROFILE

Aurelien Ngamo's story is just one of hundreds that demonstrate the power of college access services. The son of Congolese refugees, Aurelien is a 2023 Youth Academy and Worcester Technical High School graduate. During his time at Youth Academy, Aurelien took full advantage of tutoring support, mentoring, networking, and more, all while working part time and completing an internship at the YWCA.

Aurelien's commitment and intellect were fully rewarded when he was chosen as one of just 750 high school students across the country to receive the coveted Gates Scholarship. He is currently a sophomore at Boston University, studying Mechanical Engineering.

College access programs at Seven Hills ensure that talented, hardworking students with low-income backgrounds graduate from high school and college on time, enter the workforce prepared to succeed, and flourish in their communities.

## To Learn More: Upward Bound & Youth Academy

Gaelyn Hastings, Director, College Access Programs,  
617.866.1293, [ghastings@sevenhills.org](mailto:ghastings@sevenhills.org).





## SUPPORTERS IN FULL SWING FOR COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

On the Thursday before Memorial Day each May, the New Beginnings Charity Golf Tournament draws a field of gregarious golfers who understand the importance of this annual event for thousands of children and adults with disabilities in Central Massachusetts.

Hosted at Highfields Golf & Country Club in Grafton, MA, New Beginnings is the primary funder of Community Connections, a program of Seven Hills Family Services. Community Connections offers activities for people with disabilities to cultivate their interests and expand their social circles. Programming includes the arts, health and wellness, and Special Olympics and recreational sports.

New Beginnings' success has led to the expansion of Seven Hills' Special Olympic and recreation opportunities in Central and North Central Massachusetts. More than 100 new participants are joining in the new programming fun, which includes bowling, a creative arts club, and a book club at the Worcester Public Library.

The competitive lineup added two basketball teams and a flag football team. New equipment for the teams' volunteer coaches enhances the competition and pumps up the pride. All of this is made possible through New Beginnings, and most of the opportunities are free!

Community Connections' success is also achieved through the dedicated corps of volunteer coaches, many of whom return each year for the team building, camaraderie, and lifelong relationships that are forged through this meaningful opportunity to mentor and motivate.

### To Learn More: SHFS Community Connections

Noreen Alves, Regional Recreation & Grant Coordinator  
508.796.1515, noalves@sevenhills.org.



*I have had the privilege of coaching some outstanding athletes through Seven Hills Special Olympics, including my son Patrick. Thank you to the golfers and donors of the New Beginning Golf Tournament for helping Seven Hills expand and grow opportunities in Central and North Central Massachusetts. Together, we are creating opportunities for building self-esteem, friendships, and joy in so many of our athletes.*

—David Burke



Parent/coach David Burke and his son, Patrick

Thank you to our generous  
Presenting Sponsor!



37th Annual New Beginnings Charity Golf Tournament

**SAVE THE DATE: MAY 22, 2025**

Register/Donate at [sevenhills.org/nbgolf](https://sevenhills.org/nbgolf)

# FINDING PEACE OF MIND—AND JOY—ON THE MOUNTAIN

## JOEY'S JOURNEY AT CROTCHED MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

When Angie and Rocco first explored the idea of sending their son, Joey, to a residential school, it was a decision fraught with emotions. At the time, Joey was a 19-year-old non-verbal young man with unique needs. The thought of him living away from their New York home seemed daunting. However, their search for a program that could support Joey in reaching his full potential led to the top of a New Hampshire mountain—and to a new chapter in their family's journey.

Located in Greenfield, NH, Crotched Mountain School (CMS) is a residential and education program for children and young adults who are on the autism spectrum, and/or have disabilities and other life challenges.

From their first interaction with the CMS admissions team, Angie and Rocco felt a sense of hope.

**“The staff’s focus on building independent vocational skills aligned perfectly with our vision for Joey’s future. We wanted a meaningful life for him—friends, communication skills, and the ability to work someday.**

Joey has blossomed since his enrollment. Trust in staff has allowed him to progress in communication and daily living skills. Using TouchChat, a specialized app, Joey can share his thoughts and emotions through FaceTime chats with his family. For Angie and Rocco, hearing Joey say, “I feel happy” to his sister, Abby, was a moment they’ll never forget.

Joey’s days are filled with activities that tap into his adventurous spirit. The adaptive hiking trails, kayaking on the mountain lake, and recreational therapy in the campus garden have become his favorites. The impact of structured programs, like the New Hampshire Special Olympics, foster Joey’s sense of belonging and teamwork.

The couple’s decision to enroll Joey at Crotched Mountain School has been bittersweet.

**“The separation is never easy, but knowing he’s safe, supported, and thriving gives us peace of mind.** —Angie

The school’s commitment to open communication has been key. Weekly updates from Joey’s caregivers and meaningful dialogue ensure that Angie and Rocco remain active participants in Joey’s personal journey.

For Joey’s family, the staff’s dedication has left an indelible mark.

**“They don’t just see Joey as a student, they see him as one of their own. That level of compassion and care is rare, and it’s what makes Crotched Mountain so special.** —Angie

The family wants to convey that the decision to pursue a residential program isn’t easy, but it can be life-changing.

**“Crotched Mountain isn’t just a school—it’s a community. Here, Joey is growing in ways we never imagined, and that growth has given our family a new sense of hope for his future.** —Angie

Joey’s journey is a testament to the life-changing impact of dedicated educators, innovative programs, and a supportive community. Through his time at Crotched Mountain School, Joey isn’t just learning—he’s thriving.



Joey and Abby setting up the shot



# LEADING WITH HEART AT CROTCHED MOUNTAIN SCHOOL



## MEET COLLEEN ELLIOTT, CMS PRINCIPAL

For Colleen Elliott, stepping into the role of principal at Crotched Mountain School (CMS) was more than a career move—it was a calling. Her journey with CMS has been one of transformation, resilience, and unwavering dedication to the students and staff she leads.

“***The most rewarding part of my role is the time I spend with our students. Watching them grow, learn, and thrive in an environment tailored to their unique needs is truly special.***”

Colleen became the principal during a challenging time in the school's history. She accepted the position knowing the school was slated to close along with navigating the uncertainties of COVID-19.

In 2022, CMS transitioned to the Seven Hills network and Colleen welcomed new leadership to tour the campus. Conversations with Seven Hills leaders reignited hope. “They saw the potential of this campus and what it could continue to offer to students with disabilities,” said Elliott.

Since then, CMS has undergone a transformation, with Seven Hills prioritizing the needs of students and staff. Elliott admits that it hasn't been easy, but knowing that the school staff is backed by a leadership team that shares their vision makes all the difference.

Under Colleen's leadership, the CMS education team adapts curriculum and approaches to each student's pace and personality. As a result, she has witnessed countless success stories that prove the CMS difference.

For example, one student enrolled at CMS after a lengthy hospital stay due to severe behavioral challenges. The student struggled with communication and following his schedule. Through persistence and trust, he opened up, engaged, and achieved remarkable milestones including high school graduation, attending college, playing sports, and living semi-independently. “Watching him grow into the young man he is today is a testament to what we can achieve together,” said Elliott.

Looking ahead, Colleen's hopes for CMS are clear:

“***I want us to continue serving students who need a unique environment like ours. My goal is to foster a community that upholds the Seven Hills Core Values and prioritizes student success, staff well-being, and family engagement.***”

### To Learn More: Crotched Mountain School

Peter Gow, outreach & referral coordinator  
978.355.4541 x4128, [pgow@sevenhills.org](mailto:pgow@sevenhills.org).

# DONOR SPOTLIGHT: LIGHTING UP THE LIVES OF PEOPLE SUPPORTED



Sharon Goldberg, Karen Reynolds, and Eileen and Jerry Kramer

## LEGACY GIVING AT SEVEN HILLS FOUNDATION

For more than 20 years, Jerry and Eileen Kramer have supported Seven Hills Foundation with their legacy of generous giving. Over \$128,000 in donations have impacted Seven Hills initiatives such as anniversary galas, capital campaigns, New Beginnings and Lori Lajoie golf tournaments, holiday appeals, and memorial giving. The Kramers have also helped to fund capital improvements to the Seven Hills Community Services (SHCS) group residential program that has supported their two sons.

The Kramers recently provided a generous gift of \$5,000 to launch the Karen Reynold’s “Out & About Fund,” to provide community outings for residents in the homes across SHCS and Seven Hills NeuroCare (SHNC). The donation honors Karen’s retirement after 45 years of service at Seven Hills. The Kramers announced their gift at Karen’s retirement party in December. Jerry spoke with appreciation for Karen’s leadership and dedication to the people she supported, including their sons.

In 2022, one of the Kramer’s sons experienced a medical emergency. He was rushed to the hospital, and Karen was there waiting for the Kramers. Their son needed surgery, and Karen remained by the couple’s side for the duration. Post-surgery, the Kramer’s son had to remain hospitalized for a month. Karen arranged for staff to be with him around the clock.

***Karen respects the people she supports and leads by example. We are proud to start Karen’s Out & About Fund and will contribute each year to honor Karen.***

Seven Hills is grateful to Jerry and Eileen for focusing on the needs of participants and families. May the impact of their legacy inspire others to follow their example.

**Donate to the Karen Reynold’s Out & About Fund:**  
[sevenhills.org/donate](https://sevenhills.org/donate)

## YOU, INC.’S WORCESTER FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER HOSTS COMMUNITY BABY SHOWER



The **Worcester Family Resource Center (WFRC)**, hosted a Community Baby Shower for new or expecting mothers in need. The honored guests received gift bags filled with baby supplies, and car seats from the Department of Public Health. **Pernet Family Health Service, the Worcester Community Partnership, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Help Line** and more provided information, supplies, and door prizes. **Amie Richard**, RN, BSN, Pernet’s Maternal/Child Health nursing coordinator, and **Michelle Horne**, LICSW, Doula/Maternal & Child Health specialist for the City of Worcester Division of Public Health, discussed maternal health, postpartum support, safe sleep/feeding practices, and car seat installation/safety. They noted new parent resources and free Doula services for MassHealth recipients.





### BALLROOM DANCE SHOWCASE: YEAR 14!

Over the last 14 years, **Heidi Schoenfeldt**, Ballroom Dance instructor and competitor, has volunteered her time to run a free ballroom dance class for our Seven Hills community on Wednesday nights, culminating in each season-ending “Showcase.”

The 14th annual Ballroom Dance Showcase was held in December, at Seven Hills ASPIRE!, 150 Goddard Memorial Drive in Worcester. Heidi and her team of volunteer ballroom partners led our dancers gracefully around the floor to shine! The holiday-themed outfits

and decorations helped make the night special for our dancers, their family, and friends who came to admire their ballroom skills.

Heidi is an example of how community volunteers can uplift the people we support, and she promised to be back in October 2025:



***I want to thank all my Seven Hills volunteers—Dam, Steve, Joe, Luc, and Marie—for all their patience and caring. You all helped your dance partners feel comfortable and dance their best. I hope you can all join me again next fall!***



### GENEROSITY IS AT THE CORE OF PERSONAL WORK/LIFE BALANCE

YOU, Inc. is deeply grateful to longtime volunteer and donor, **Sarah Groppo**, a mother of two school-aged children and director of Practice Development at Accure for Acne.

It is through her Instagram-based fundraising project, “Know Where it Goes,” that Sarah channels her “generous” energy. Through social media outreach, Sarah leads more than 300 followers in funding for young people supported by YOU, Inc., and other agencies across Worcester County.



***WFRC estimates that Sarah and her network of loyal donors have contributed more than \$50,000 for YOU, Inc. and its transformative programs. —Mahly Alejandro, WFRC director***

Thank you, Sarah, for your heart-filled compassion and boundless energy to raise awareness for and support our neighbors in need throughout Central MA and beyond!

## GRANTING GOOD WORK!

Seven Hills Foundation leverages grants and other support to strengthen and expand our work across 15 affiliates in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. Grants support programs not typically funded through traditional sources, providing opportunities to develop and implement initiatives that enhance the lives of people faced with significant life challenges. Following are highlights of recently funded projects:

### REBUILDING ACCESSIBLE RECREATION AND SPORTS PROGRAM

For decades, **Crotched Mountain School (CMS)** ran a successful adaptive sports program tailored to students with developmental and physical disabilities. This ceased in 2022, when the for-profit owner relinquished operation of CMS and departed with all of the school's adaptive sports equipment. This action nearly eliminated the adaptive sports program and opportunity for students to experience the joys of recreation and physical activity like other kids their age.

Seven Hills purchased Crotched Mountain School in November 2022, and established Seven Hills New Hampshire (SHNH) to operate the facilities. Since then, Seven Hills has committed to restoring the residential and therapeutic education program.



With generous grants from the **Saab Family Foundation (\$10,500)** and the **Getz Charitable Trust, Citizens Bank, N.A. (\$5,000)**, Seven Hills New Hampshire is purchasing new equipment to rebuild its adaptive sports program. Thank you to these funders for recognizing the importance of enabling CMS students to participate in recreation and sports activities with the use of this equipment.

### POST-OVERDOSE RESPONSE TEAM TRAINING IN TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

For more than 70 years, **Seven Hills Behavioral Health (SHBH)** has served vulnerable populations in Southeast Massachusetts. The affiliate's programs include comprehensive treatment, prevention, and case management services for people struggling with substance use disorders, often exacerbated by medical, psychological, and social challenges. Services are delivered within a harm-reduction framework by staff who are reflective of the communities served, some having lived experience with substance use disorders.

SHBH promotes post-overdose support and harm reduction through a blend of services including Community Wellness Centers in Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton; Syringe Service Programs; Opioid Overdose and Substance Use Disorder Education and Prevention; Overdose Prevention and Naloxone Distribution; Naloxone Education and Enrollments; Post-Opioid Overdose Response Teams and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Programs; and Intensive Correctional Health Linkage Services.

**The Post Overdose Response Team (PORT)** has been in operation since 2017, and works with first responders, faith-based leaders, and local community-based partners to provide PORT services in New Bedford and Fall River with expanded services in the communities of Swansea, Fairhaven, and Dartmouth. PORT interactions focus on providing necessary care, removing the stigma associated with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD), and breaking down barriers between community members and police.

Thank you to the **National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO)** that recently awarded a \$20,000 grant to SHBH to provide PORT Training in Trauma-Informed Practices (PORT-TIP). This project is a six-month training and funding opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of PORT through comprehensive training on trauma-informed approaches and evaluation assessment planning. Through the scope of work, SHBH will receive training and technical assistance (TTA) through asynchronous course work, peer learning, and individualized TTA to develop evaluation plans that will assist them in measuring the implementation and impact of trauma-informed practices.





## EXPANDING A CREATIVE SPACE FOR ARTISTS WITH DISABILITIES TO EXPRESS THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH THE COMMUNITY

The **Open Door Gallery (ODG)** at the **Worcester Art Museum (WAM)**—or ODG@WAM—was launched in 2017 as a partnership between Seven Hills Foundation and its affiliate, **Open Door Arts**, and the Worcester Art Museum with the mission to create an accessible cultural space that features the work of artists with disabilities and expands the understanding of living with a disability.

Now in its eighth year, ODG@WAM, which is located in the Higgins Education Wing, has showcased the work of a diverse group of artists with disabilities whose artistry, stories, and culture inspire wonder, curiosity, reflection, and dialogue with the community.

Envisioning the future of this unique space, ambitious plans are in place to create a cultural experience that represents people with disabilities as artists, leaders, and visitors. With funding this year from the **Greater Worcester Community Foundation** and the **Worcester Arts Council**, ODG@WAM is featuring:

- ▶ Two solo exhibits by Moriah Faith and Camilla Jerome
- ▶ One curated group exhibit by artists selected from the first open call for art.
- ▶ Two group exhibits by Seven Hills ASPIRE! Day Program participants in the Creative Minds Program.
- ▶ Stipends for artists showing their work at ODG@WAM.

The generous funding also includes:

- ▶ Hiring an artist/cultural worker with disabilities as a part-time gallery manager.
- ▶ Creating a four-member gallery committee composed of WAM's curator of Contemporary Art and three artists with disabilities who will lead the calls for art process.
- ▶ Implementing the highest accessibility standards featuring large print gallery guides, audio tours, and sighted guide and American Sign Language (ASL) tours.

Generous grants from **UniBank**, **Webster Five Foundation**, and the **J. Irving England and Jane L. England Charitable Trust** are funding the continuance of ODG@WAM's "Connecting and Creating Through the Arts Program." The program supports over 80 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) supported through Seven Hills' Day programs with access to a 32-week "Elements of Creation" class and weekly drop-in "Art Unlocked" program organized and led by WAM faculty.

## PROVIDING EMERGENCY CARE IN GROUP RESIDENTIAL HOMES

Affiliate **Seven Hills Rhode Island (SHRI)** offers a comprehensive residential services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, brain injury, and complex medical and/or behavioral challenges. SHRI's group homes are designed to offer each person maximum independence while ensuring they are living safe, healthy, and fulfilled lives.

The program's trained, professional keeps residents closely connected to their loved ones and communities, partnering with family members, guardians, and other providers. SHRI coordinates this integrated approach with the director of clinical services, a licensed psychologist, a doctoral-level board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA), and a director of health services and their highly qualified team of licensed practitioners.



Seven Hills Rhode Island is grateful for the generous grant of \$20,000 from the **Special Medical Program of the Rhode Island Foundation** to purchase and install Automated External Defibrillator (AEDs) in 12 of our group residential homes. With this grant, Seven Hills Rhode Island is the first agency in the area to install AEDs in residential homes for adults and seniors with I/DD and complex medical needs.

Thank you to the Rhode Island Foundation for entrusting SHRI and its residential staff with the equipment needed to administer on-site emergency care to its residents when every second counts.

# SPOTLIGHT

## SEVEN HILLS ASPIRE!

Seven Hills ASPIRE! in Hopedale hosted a **Fashion Show** for the women in the program.



The event was made possible through the generosity of **Jackie's Boutique**. Located within Milford High School, Jackie's Boutique lends gowns to anyone needing fancy attire for an upcoming event. Sandy Gray created the boutique in memory of her daughter, Jackie, who tragically passed away at age 19 from injuries sustained in a car accident. Sandy's mission is to make women feel beautiful and to make people smile. Mission accomplished!

Program Director Melissa Boulos noted the ASPIRE! models' flair for the runway and posing for photographs.

“*The Fashion Show was a highlight in my five-year career with ASPIRE! The joy it brought to the ASPIRE! models was heartwarming. The fantastic staff assisted the models with fittings, hair, makeup, nails, and poses. We hope to make the Fashion Show an annual event.* —Melissa Boulos

## SEVEN HILLS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH (SHBH)



**Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)** is a federally funded initiative to prepare students from low-income households for post-secondary education. Funds are distributed at the state level and awarded to school districts comprising the highest poverty levels, dropout rates, and persistent generational underachievement.

GEAR UP grantees such as the Seven Hills program in New Bedford, serve a cohort of students from seventh grade through high school. The SHBH GEAR UP cohort is based in Normandin Middle School and New Bedford High School.

In October 2024, the SHBH program marked 25 years of success with “GEAR UP Week.” Events were scheduled for the students that combined fun, giving back, and promoting the program's success.

**Annette Blankenship**, lead staff for the **Post-Overdose Project**, was honored with the prestigious Sydney Adam's Award by the Inter-Church Council of Greater New Bedford.



This achievement is a testament to Annette's exceptional dedication and the incredible impact SHBH programs have on the community.

Annette teams up each week with a pastor and police officer to visit families who have lost a loved one to a fatal overdose. They also reach people who are homeless and many who are caught up in the cycle of substance abuse. Annette believes in her 5+ years with SHBH. “You are only as good as your team. Don't judge, show love!”

## SEVEN HILLS COMMUNITY SERVICES (SHCS)



The residents and staff at the **SHCS home on Sand Hill Road in Groton, MA**, organized a special visit before Christmas, to Groton's police and fire departments to show appreciation for the first responders' service.



**Dr. Kathee Jordan**, Seven Hills President & CEO, visited the **SHCS team at Deer Hill Lane in Carver** to share initiatives that are underway across the affiliate. The initiatives will outline new work efficiencies and best practices. Dr. Jordan talked about Diversity, Equity, Inclusion,



and Belonging (DEIB) and Director Jacob Kelley's formation of Employee Resource Groups and Affinity Spaces to move the voices of our staff to the forefront of our work.

Area Director Brittany Roy apprised Dr. Jordan on the success of the home's management, and the overall progress being made in Southeastern Massachusetts.

#### SEVEN HILLS FAMILY SERVICES (SHFS)



The soccer teams of Seven Hills Family Services made the state tournament in Byfield on November. Worcester-based **Seven Hills Knights**, coached by father-daughter duo, **Kevin Heman** and **Kelsey Heman**, placed second, earning silver medals.

The Fitchburg-based **Seven Hills Revolution**, coached by **David Burke** and **Rachel Lindburg**, earned the 3rd-place bronze medal.



The **SHFS Recreation program** has a longstanding record of success offering healthy, skill-building activities that enrich lives and help build community. Our gratitude is endless for the families, volunteers, and coaches who have been in our

program for years and never waver in their dedication and enthusiasm.



**SHFS Family Support Specialist Dina Hammad** was presented with the North Central IEP Specialist award from the Department of Developmental Services' Child and Transition Team for her excellence in assisting families in the transitioning process.



North Central region families are lucky to have Dina by their sides as she teaches them to advocate for their loved ones with developmental disabilities throughout the IEP and 504 process. Thank you, Dina!

#### SEVEN HILLS GLOBAL OUTREACH (SHGO)

In January 2025, Dr. David A. Jordan, President Emeritus of Seven Hills Foundation, and members of Seven Hills Global Outreach visited its partners: **Zion Ministries in Sierra Leone**, and **HOCAP (Home of Care and Protection) in Ghana**.

In Sierra Leone, the SHGO team met with the leader of the **Running-4-Clean Water 5K fundraiser, Willie Kamara**. The charity event began 13 years ago

in Garland, TX, to support SHGO's work in some of the most remote villages in Bo, Sierra Leone. Mr. Kamara traveled from Texas to witness firsthand the incredible work made possible through the annual event.



Since 2009, SHGO has partnered with local organizations in four African countries, building clean water wells, sanitation systems, schools, and medical clinics. SHGO pioneered microfinance loans to impoverished farming families, and established vocational training centers to uplift people living in some of the poorest communities on earth.



See photos from the latest trip and learn more at [shgo.org](https://shgo.org).

#### SEVEN HILLS NEUROCARE (SHNC)

The Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIAMA) hosted its **7th Annual Advocacy Day** at the MA State House on February 4. Presenters included Senator Paul Feeney and State Representative Kimberly Ferguson championed the Cognitive Rehabilitation Bill that, if passed, would ensure that commercial insurance plans include



cognitive rehabilitation for brain injury survivors. State Representative Jeff Roy propositioned for “An Act Establishing A Primary Seat Belt Law” to serve as a proactive measure to reduce traumatic brain injuries resulting from motor vehicle accidents. Acquired brain injury (ABI) survivors provided testimonials on how they have benefited from legislative support.



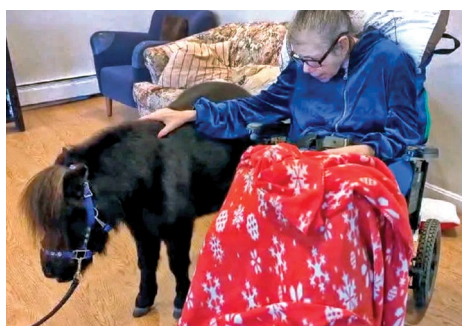
Representing SHNC, a BIAMA Mission Partner, were AVP and director of Clinical Services, Allison Rothschild; area director for Central & Metro Regions, Felecia Burns-Yanis; Salisbury residence director, Ebenezer Acheampong; Salisbury assistant residence director, Kofi Kyei; and Richmond Ave. residence director, Vondell Wright.

The SHNC team met with local legislators to advocate for the ABI fiscal initiatives. New developments include the FY’26 Budget Ask of \$33 million for the Statewide Head Injury Program. The ABI Advisory Board Bill, if passed, would establish a permanent ABI board to support the legislative process for the identified population.



*It was powerful to support the directionality of services and actively exercise an impassioned commitment to those we serve. I was honored to be a part of this SHNC initiative and look forward to any upcoming opportunities to rally the cause further!*

— Felecia Burns-Yanis



Mr. Buttons, from **Lifting Spirits Miniature Therapy Horses**, received a cheerful welcome from residents and staff at a **Seven Hills NeuroCare home** in Andover in November. Everyone loved Mr. Buttons, and Mr. Buttons loved the apple treats! Thank you to Lisa Howard, LPN, who planned the surprise visit from the friendly, furry “neigh”bor.

#### SEVEN HILLS NEW HAMPSHIRE (SHNH)

**Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** is a framework that, rather than just correcting negative behaviors, teaches and rewards positive behaviors, like kindness, responsibility, and safety.



To promote PBIS school-wide and underscore its effectiveness, the team at the SHNH Crotched Mountain School has launched **Eagle Bucks**, an exciting initiative named after the school mascot. Through the PBIS program, students earn Eagle Bucks whenever they demonstrate the school’s core values: Be Safe, Be Kind, Do Your Part. Students can then spend their Eagle Bucks at the new school store, stocked with fidgets, snacks, small electronics, and more.

Recently, one student saved 25 Eagle Bucks to purchase a Bluetooth speaker—a great example of setting a goal and working toward it! Teachers also incorporate Eagle Bucks into classroom lessons, helping students see how positive choices lead to positive rewards. Way to go, Eagles, keep soaring!



The **Crotched Mountain School for the Deaf** held a reunion in September. More than 50 alumni enjoyed reconnecting, recollecting, and reflecting on their time spent at the school. A campus tour revealed the school’s evolution over the years.

The reunion was a poignant reminder of Crotched Mountain’s lasting impact on its students and the strong bonds that continue to bring them together.

#### SEVEN HILLS PEDIATRIC CENTER (SHPC)



Seven Hills Pediatric Center held an Open House in October to honor the dedication and commitment of **Anne Joseph** and **Brian Fjeld**. The special couple garnered the support of their family and friends to raise over \$57,000 to establish a Multisensory Room at SHPC in memory of their



daughter, Anja, who did not survive the irreversible brain damage she suffered from complications during her birth.

The Multisensory Room enhances the quality of life for the 82 residents with developmental disabilities and complex medical care needs.

Thank you to Sara Attridge, therapy manager; Meredith Denley, COTA; David Munyaka, COTA; and chef extraordinaire, Deb Robbins, who helped make the event so special!



**Congresswoman Lori Trahan** visited SHPC at Groton in October. She toured the center and was introduced to some of the children who live there and staff on duty.

Congresswoman Trahan met with members of Seven Hills senior leadership: Dr. Kathee Jordan, President & CEO; Bill Stock, VP for government and community relations; Joe Allred, Senior VP of children's services; and Holly Jarek, interim administrator. The Seven Hills team thanked Congresswoman Trahan for all her support in Medicaid funding. Staffing was at its highest level in many years primarily because of that support.

On September 15, the **Annual Family Picnic** was held on the grounds of Seven Hills Pediatric Center at Groton to the delight of residents, families, and staff. A gorgeous day added to the atmosphere as music from the Hip Swayers performed and quickly became a new favorite!

SHPC residents, their families, and staff, enjoyed farm animals, face painting, games, an ice cream truck, and an incredible BBQ lunch! The

annual event gives families time to connect with their loved ones and each other and visit the SHPC team.



### SEVEN HILLS RHODE ISLAND (SHRI)

*Monster Mash'd*, the 27th performance from TRAIN (Trinity Rep's Imagination Network) was held at the historic Barker Playhouse on January 14.

A collaboration of SHRI and the Trinity Repertory Company, the production was directed by Trinity Rep's Jordan Butterfield and Manny Maldonado, with coordination by Lauren Fagnant, treatment coordinator at SHRI. Fagnant has been instrumental in advancing this arts experience for youth and adults, and supporting the grant funding from the **Fogarty Foundation** and the **Rhode Island State Council on the Arts**.



The TRAIN actors began rehearsing in October, studying improv, character development, and team building. Celebrating 14 years, TRAIN helps its actors build new skills, confidence, and pride in their accomplishment.



**Marissa Ruff**, SHRI vice president, presented a **Seven Hills Hero award to Bernice Bonadie**, RN, at the Seven Hills Board of Directors Meeting in November. Bernice joined SHRI just over a year ago and decided to visit a residence on her weekend off in early November. Shortly after she arrived, a loud noise was heard coming from a resident's room. Bernice responded and assessed that food was lodged in the resident's throat. She successfully performed the Heimlich maneuver and staff called 911. The resident was checked and cleared by medical staff at the scene.

Staff believes that guardian angels were in the home that day, watching over Bernice who was at the right place at the right time. SHRI is extremely grateful for Bernice's heroic action and nursing excellence deserving of the award and recognition.

### CHILDREN'S AID & FAMILY SERVICE (CAFS)

The **Child Care Resources (CCR)** caseload has risen by more than 3,000 children since last year at this time. It is rewarding to see that over 14,000 children across Central and Western Massachusetts are receiving child care through financial assistance.

CCR is processing a rate increase for its network of child care providers: an 8% increase for centers serving infants; a 9% increase for centers



serving toddlers; and a 1.5% increase for those serving school-aged children and family child care providers.



Paint, paneling, and flooring upgrades have refreshed the interior of the **Child Enrichment Center (CEC)** in Fitchburg. Seven Hills' assistant vice president of Facilities Management, Michael Kendrick, noted the project's scope and timeframe.

“*During the 2024 holiday break, our contractor, Prime Building, replaced the flooring and base in all six classrooms, the offices, and the corridors. We painted the walls and ceilings. Plywood wainscoting was added for durability and safety in the classrooms. This work had to be completed during the two-week break. Prime Building did a fantastic job balancing a quality installation with the speed necessary to meet the tight schedule.* —Mike Kendrick

CEC staff, the children, and their families are thrilled with the gleaming results. The modernity of the space brightens the dwindling days of winter and sets the tones for spring.



With graduation drawing closer, **CEC's Pre-K teachers** are preparing their students for kindergarten. They are working more frequently and in depth on writing their letters and names, sharpening reading skills, and mastering simple math skills. On graduation day, the students will be more than ready to shed the “Pre-” and forge ahead with the capital “K.”

**CHILDREN'S FRIEND (CF)**

The **Early Learning Center (ELC)** held a Literacy Celebration Week, March 3–7. During the week, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles visited the center to read to the children. Fire Fighters John and John added a heroic flair to the reading stage, distributing fire helmets, badges, and coloring pages to their riveted listeners.



The ambitious staff also scheduled a Silly Week to coincide with the Literacy Celebration Week—and why not? The reading experience is elevated to a whole new level when silliness abounds!

The ELC's silly lineup for the week began with Silly hat/hair day, Monday; Mismatch day, Tuesday; Disney day, Wednesday; Polka dot day, Thursday, featuring the preschool class wearing their handmade polka-dotted t-shirts; and Pajama day, Friday. It was a whirlwind week filled with lots of literacy and laughs along the way!



**FAMILY SERVICES OF CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS (FSCM)**

**RSVP Volunteers of Central MA** is part of AmeriCorps Seniors, one of the largest volunteer networks in the nation for adults, aged 55+.

The **RSVP Blanketts crochet group** donated 27 crocheted blankets along with over 60 handmade hats and mittens. Crocheted with love, the garments are made to warm the hands, heads, and hearts of many in the Worcester area during the winter.





For the past three years, the **RSVP Volunteers of FSCM** have donated Bombas Socks to the Central MA Housing Alliance, which delivered 5,000 pairs to area shelters, helping more than 500 families!

#### OPEN DOOR ARTS (ODA)

The Open Door Gallery at the Worcester Art Museum hosted a reception for the exhibit of artist, Camilla Jerome, titled, "Patient, Patient."

During the event, Camilla discussed how living with chronic illness has inspired her work:



***My artistic practice has grown alongside my pain, and my life is inseparable from these images on paper, bedsheets, shells, and bone. Like a silver print developing in the darkroom, I'm bringing clarity to the surface by reaching out from the corners of my psyche to reclaim lost time and missed connections.***



#### STETSON SCHOOL

Stetson School was well-represented at the MASOC (Massachusetts Society for a World Free of Sexual Harm by Youth) Child and Adolescent conference in October. Clinical Director Julieanne Chace, LICSW; Senior Director of Clinical Services Kathleen Buckley, LMHC, LCMHC; and Assistant Vice President Sally Gulmi, M.Ed, presented the workshop,

#### "Rising Acuity in Residential Treatment: Why is It Happening and What Do We Do About It?"

The workshop addressed factors contributing to the rising acuity, challenges faced by residential treatment programs, and ideas to consider in conceptualizing new ways to approach residential treatment.



The presentation's breakout session sparked discussion about the pressing need for change in residential care to better meet the needs of high acuity youth. Meaningful dialogue addressed areas for improvement, insights, and innovation.



All were inspired to think proactively about adapting care models to be more responsive, effective, and trauma-informed. This collective approach laid a strong foundation for ongoing development and commitment to positive change.

#### YOU, INC. (YI)

The Dynamy John S. Laws Youth Academy (JSLYA) is a college access and leadership opportunity for first-generation Worcester Public School students. In October, students, alumni, and staff demonstrated the program's longtime success during a breakfast hosted at the Ellsworth Youth & Family Center in Worcester.

The City's Mayor, Joe Petty, attended along with funders and supporters.



Student stories of encouragement and guidance were inspiring. The alumni in attendance were a testament to the program's legacy and success.

YOU, Inc.'s **Family Resource Centers (FRCs)** in Worcester and Southbridge are providing the coveted education program, "**Nurturing Fathers.**" According to [nurturingfathers.com](http://nurturingfathers.com), Mark Perlman, MA, authored the 13-week parenting curriculum, now being implemented in organizations nationwide. Perlman is a Florida Supreme Court-certified family mediator with 35 years of experience in family mediation and consulting.

FRC staff created a virtual option for fathers in Central MA, resulting in 13 fathers on track to graduate. The training and techniques help fathers improve parenting skills, regain child custody, and build stronger families.



***Nurturing Fathers is helping me to cope with things, and the classes are powerful in helping me be a good father. The classes are helping me figure things out more, and you are doing great for us fathers who are in need.***

—Father in the WFRN Nurturing Fathers program

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