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April 2021

Essential Workers movement gains momentum

Virtual Caring Force rally to take place via Zoom on May 14

Take a drive across Massachusetts and you'll likely have an opportunity to pass by a billboard thanking the state's essential human services workers who fill more than 180,000 jobs in the sector.

The Caring Force is proudly sharing the message along major roadways in seven communities so far: Billerica, Boston, Brockton, Framingham, Peabody, Springfield and Worcester.

There are also nearly 3,200 blue yard signs dotting lawns across the state, as well as "thank you" public service announcements featuring Gov. Charlie Baker and EOHHS Secretary Marylou Sudders airing on stations from Boston to Pittsfield.

"Our sector's leaders are enormously proud of our essential workers and their numerous acts of heroism during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Council President & CEO Michael Weekes. "Please join us in thanking them in your local community."

Recently, Council members have sent nearly 1,200 emails to legislators as part of TCF's ongoing e-advocacy campaign, an initiative urging legislators to co-sponsor bills of great importance to human services organizations.

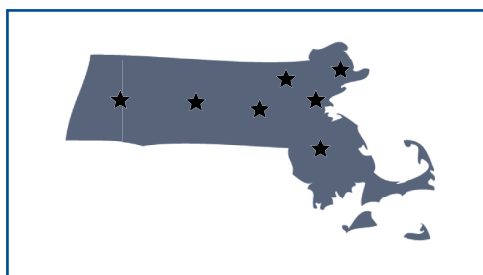
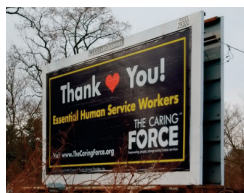
The Council introduced four bills in mid-February — two in

the House and two in the Senate — that would create a student loan repayment program for human services workers and eliminate the pay disparity between state workers and those employed by private, community-based human services nonprofits who do similar work.

An act establishing a loan repayment program for direct care human service workers, filed by Sen. Eric Lesser and Rep. Jeffrey Roy would create an education loan repayment program for human service workers.

An act relative to fair pay for comparable work, filed by Sen. Cindy Friedman and Rep. Kay Khan would seek to eliminate the pay disparity that exists between the salaries of human services workers employed by community-based human service providers and state employees holding similar job titles who perform similar work no later than July 1, 2027.

The next exciting moment in TCF's grassroots effort comes Friday, May 14, when TCF will host a virtual rally remotely over Zoom and include speakers from the human services workforce. The traditional Caring Bear Awards will be given to two of the Council's legislative champions, and there will be breakout rooms where attendees can speak with lawmakers. More information on the Essential Workers Campaign can be found on the Council's website at www.providers.org.



ARP brings relief to sector

The massive federal American Rescue Plan, signed into law last month by President Joe Biden, has important benefits and considerations for Massachusetts human services nonprofits.

In addition to direct payments to taxpayers, expansion of child tax credits, new food and housing assistance to families, and COVID-19 testing and vaccination supports, the new law also extends the tax credit for nonprofits and other employers that voluntarily provide paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave through Sept. 30, 2021.

It also expands the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and federal unemployment coverage, among other programs that may benefit Council members. The law adds \$7.25 billion to the PPP program and expands eligibility to nonprofits with more than 500 employees that operate at multiple locations, as long as no more than 500 employees work at any one location.

The latest COVID relief package also extends various federal benefits for unemployed workers through Sept. 6; nonprofit organizations also benefit as the law extends a credit for organizations that self-insure for unemployment and increases it from 50

RESCUE, see page 7

Applications for Council's Suffolk University graduate certificate program now open

Deadline May 28 for online and in-person options

Applications are now open for the Providers' Council's Certificate in Nonprofit Human Service Management program, which will begin this fall.

More than 600 mid-career human services professionals have completed this year-long, graduate-level program, which is designed to help future leaders in the sector strengthen their management skills and learn in specialized classes with peers from other human service agencies.

The program, offered in partnership with Suffolk University in Boston, will be offered this year with both online-only and in-person options. The in-person cohort will begin

online, and transition to the classroom once it becomes safe to do so per university COVID-19 regulations.

The Certificate is composed of five mandatory blocks of classes that begin in September 2021 and end in May 2022. Classes typically meet on Fridays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Courses include: Alternative Revenue Strategies for Nonprofits; Human Services Nonprofit Management; Nonprofit Financial Management; Human Resource Management; Legal & Ethical Issues for Nonprofits; and Information-Based Management.

The curriculum is designed to build skills and knowledge in these

SUFFOLK, see page 7

Marathoner Dick Hoyt, inspired many parents, athletes with disabilities



The Council remembers Dick Hoyt, who inspired thousands of runners, parents and athletes with disabilities by pushing his son, Rick, in a wheelchair in 32 runnings of the Boston Marathon and hundreds of other races. Hoyt died on March 17 at age 80 at his home in Holland, Mass. of natural causes, his family said. At right: Hoyt was the keynote speaker at the Council's 38th Annual Convention & Expo: Champions for Change, in 2013.

Regina Marshall named Advocates COO

Advocates, Inc. has appointed Regina Marshall as Chief Operating Officer.

Marshall has served as senior vice president of administrative operations Prior to joining Advocates, Marshall was director of the Massachusetts Mental Health Center. Marshall is active in the community as chair of the MetroWest Health Foundation's Racial and Ethnic Disparities Workgroup. She serves on the Providers' Council Race, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and MetroWest YMCA Board of Directors. She holds a bachelor's degree from Simmons College and a law degree from Northeastern University.



Regina Marshall

VOAMASS appoints Rejoyce Owusu as HR director

Volunteers of America of Massachusetts has named Rejoyce Owusu its director of human resources.

Owusu will oversee all aspects of the agency's human resources activities.

Prior to joining VOAMASS, she was HR Director at ideaMACHINE Studio, a Brooklyn-based video production service, and previously worked in talent acquisition at Prudential Financial. Owusu, a Bronx, NY native, earned a bachelor's degree from SUNY Geneseo and a master's degree in management from Nazareth College.



Rejoyce Owusu

Western Mass. Council members receive Baystate Health grants

Springfield-based Baystate Health

recently announced that it granted more than \$1.2 million to 16 western Massachusetts nonprofits to support projects related to reducing social isolation, social support for youth, building connectedness to community for low-income adults and social justice. Among Council members receiving grants were **Community Adolescent Resource and Education (CARE) Center** and **Mental Health Association**.

SouthCoast Community Foundation awards \$1.27m to 20 nonprofits for COVID relief

The SouthCoast Community Foundation has awarded \$1.27 million to 20 nonprofit organizations helping to alleviate impacts stemming from the coronavirus pandemic for residents in southeastern Massachusetts. Among the Council members receiving grants were: **BAMSI, Immigrants Assistance Center** and **Old Colony YMCA**.

Central Mass. Council members receive grants for health access and food insecurity

The Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts in Fitchburg and the Greater Lowell Community Foundation in Lowell recently announced they jointly awarded \$174,898 to 15 nonprofits working to advance the health and well-being of residents in the Nashoba Valley. Council members **Advocates, Inc.** and **Our Father's House** were both selected for the awards.

Gandara and New North Citizens Council given grants to assist immigrants during pandemic

The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts recently awarded \$859,560 to 18 nonprofit organizations in the region providing di-

Amego to build six new student residences



Amego, Inc. will build and equip six new residential facilities on a 52-acre parcel in Franklin that will house 47 students ages eight through 22 who are attending the nearby Amego School. The project, financed by a MassDevelopment \$30 million tax-exempt bond, will range in size from 2,800-3,600 square feet. Each building will house seven bedrooms, at least three bathrooms, office space, medication administration space, as well as learning and recreation spaces.

rect financial assistance and support to immigrant and non-English speaking individuals and families experiencing severe economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Council members **Gandara Mental Health Center** and **New North Citizens Council** were among those chosen.

2021 Black Excellence on the Hill ceremony honors Regina Marshall and Council's Michael Weekes

Regina Marshall, chief operating officer of Advocates, Inc. (photo and recent appointment in top left announcement) and Michael Weekes, the Council president and CEO were recognized during the recent 2021 Black Excellence on the Hill honors from the Massachusetts Black & Latino Legislative Caucus.

The event celebrates Black community leaders and trailblazers. Marshall was nominated by Senate President Karen Spilka and Weekes was nominated by Sen. Eric



Michael Weekes



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About the Agency

Founded in 1968, Cape Abilities was started out of the Orleans Fire station by a group of families committed to creating inclusive opportunities for their adult children.

The mission of Cape Abilities is to serve individuals with disabilities by providing residential, social, therapeutic and employment supports, in order to empower and enable them to thrive.

Cape Abilities empowers people of all abilities to achieve their true potential and takes a place-based approach that embraces partnerships and volunteerism to promote community inclusion. Participants in day and employment programs are vital parts of their communities.

A priority of Cape Abilities is to continually demonstrate progress with action by delivering comprehensive person-centered care, while also continuing to promote community inclusion.

The organization's person-centered approach allows it to tailor its service to the unique needs and interests of each individual. Cape Abilities has paved the way for individuals with disabilities to play an active and enriching role in the Cape Cod community.

In addition, Cape Abilities creates partnerships with various local civic, social, business and educational groups in order to maximize both secular and social opportunities for individuals with disabilities, allowing their abilities to shine.

Cape Abilities has an annual operating budget of \$22 million.

Eighty-seven percent of its funding comes from state organizations, in combination with nine percent from sales at its Social Enterprise businesses and four percent from fundraising.

Providing personalized community experiences



Left: A Cape Abilities vocational specialist teaches a program participant the ins and outs of cashiering at Cape Abilities Farm Stand, one of the organization's social enterprises. Right: At Cape Abilities Farm, program participants develop the skills, professionalism, and self-confidence to succeed based on their unique interests and strengths.



After 50 years, Cape Abilities continues to provide exceptional services to more than 400 individuals with a broad range of developmental and intellectual disabilities — providing wrap-around and personalized services, while promoting community inclusion that is close to home. The number of programs offered differentiates Cape Abilities within the industry, allowing it to hone in on its holistic, wrap-around approach to service.

Cape Abilities is dedicated to ensuring that all of its offerings are personalized and of the highest quality. In January, Cape Abilities received a three-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, with the report offering zero recommendations for improvement of programs. Cape Abilities is also recognized and certified by Points of Light as a Service Enterprise.

Cape Abilities Life Skills/Day Habilitation: The life skills and day habilitation program provide therapeutic-based activities to enhance wellness and independence for individuals who need structure to succeed. It offers a variety of community-based volunteer and social activities, as well as physical exercise, arts and cultural events that are personalized to meet each individual's service plan goals.

Community Based Day Support Program (CBDS): CBDS provides a range of support and training in order

to facilitate successful employment and meaningful community involvement through assessment of participants' skills, needs, interests and exploration of various community opportunities.

Vocational: Cape Abilities' comprehensive vocational program assists individuals in applying for jobs at businesses throughout the community and provides the necessary transportation and supports for success. As part of this program, individuals may be placed in one of the agency's innovative Social Enterprises, which include Cape Abilities Farm, Cape Abilities Farm Stand and Cape Abilities Thrift.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): The Pre-ETS program supports individuals ages 16-21 with disabilities as they transition from high school into the adult services system. Cape Abilities gives candidates an introduction to employment to enhance their vocational choices, develop positive work habits, and obtain valuable work experience.

Residential Services: Cape Abilities operates 16 residential homes and several cooperative apartments that enable residents to live independently while still receiving necessary care and support. Residential Services include DDS and ABI/MFP Adult Long-Term Residential Services, MRC Statewide Head Injury Program Residential Supports, Community Living/Individual Supports, Adult Family Car and, Adult Shared Living.

Executive Leadership

Jonathan Sproul joined Cape Abilities as President and CEO in 2018. Raised in Barnstable and a graduate of Barnstable High School, Jon went on to Columbia University and completed his master's degree in school leadership from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

Prior to Cape Abilities, Sproul worked in public education and nonprofit management. He served as director of institutional advancement & school-community partnerships for Boston Public Schools, executive director of Boston Educational Development Foundation, and director of development for the former South Boston High School.



Jonathan Sproul

As a leader, Sproul is deeply committed to providing quality programming, increasing equitable access to opportunity and demonstrating measurable results. Driven by this commitment, he created the program quality and partnership effectiveness standards for the Boston Public Schools; he identified place-based indicators that impact academic achievement to create the Opportunity Index that equitably distributes resources to schools that serve the highest concentrations of students in need. He also created the partnership platform: partnerbps.org.

Sproul is passionate about professionalizing the field of direct support professionals and launched the Workforce Investment Plan at Cape Abilities to attract and retain the highest quality direct support professionals.

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

Pathways staff committed to 'changing the world' for survivors

Pathways for Change, Inc.'s staff, interns and volunteers embody the spirit of this well-known quote by Margaret Mead. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

They embrace the diversity of Pathways mission and vision to provide quality and multicultural services to those whose lives have been impacted by sexual violence and to provide education geared toward ending violence. They come from diverse backgrounds and experiences and bring a collective wisdom to the work they do, truly representing the community they serve, said Pathways for Change President and CEO Kim Dawkins.

The Pathways team provides their skills in English, Spanish, Portuguese and American Sign Language and to all survivors — regardless of gender — with compassion and empathy.

All of them have learned about the unique needs of survivors, the sociological dynamics of Sexual Violence, along with how to support survivors emotionally (including within medical and legal settings) in a nonjudgmental way, Dawkins said.

Since 1975, the Pathways team has collectively helped thousands of survivors and their loved ones, move from Survivor

to Thriver. One survivor recently shared: "I feel so fortunate...I feel empowered and I have so many more emotional "tools" in my toolbox. Thank you Pathways for Change!"

The Pathways team also provides violence prevention education for youth and young adults across central Massachusetts. This impact can be powerful, as commented by a case worker at another youth serving organization during the pandemic, "We've had the most engagement (from young survivors) during your virtual group than we've had in the past. The conversations were inspiring."

The Pathways team members have been with the agency from as little as six months to more than 22 years.

Regardless of the length of their tenure, they all bond in their roles as community health workers, support counselors, peer educators and networkers, and are social justice "champions for change" and are therefore uniquely qualified for this work, Dawkins said.

They tirelessly continue to support survivors every day, and are, as Margaret Mead's quote suggests... "a small group of thoughtful committed people, changing the world."



Pathways for Change staffers pride themselves on teamwork and offering 24/7 support to survivors of sexual violence.

EDITORIAL



Michael Weekes
President / Publisher

End the notion of “the other”

As we prepare to recognize the month of May as *Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month*, perhaps it's also an opportune time to begin ridding our national consciousness of the offensive characterization and treatment of people as “the other.”

Congress, in honoring the many people of Asian descent that helped to build this nation, increased the length of recognition in 1992 from a weeklong designation to a month. It is a time when America recognizes the role Asian Americans, and in particular, Chinese immigrants, had in helping to construct this nation's transcontinental railroad and their many other achievements.

Yet, they were badly mistreated then, and today this nation continues to fail to satisfactorily address its racist behavior and actions against Asian American and Pacific Islanders and, relatedly, BIPOC communities.

Fortunately our AAPI brothers and sisters, like our Black, Indigenous and people of color, are not fleeing this nation out of fear. In fact, the fastest growing demographic group in the United States is AAPI.

While numbers alone won't determine progress in racial equity, there is stronger emerging leadership that could lead to more effective policies and laws. And there remains hope that in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words “a dream...that will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed...that all men are created equal.” What makes that creed and those of a different hue so difficult for many to accept?

For those who are woke, a reminder is not needed that America seems too comfortable dehumanizing those who may look, worship or speak differently. The tragedy in Atlanta spas on March 16 exemplifies the intersectionality of our nation's obsession with xenophobia, misogyny and abject racism of those categorized as the “other.” It was another tragic reflection of this nation's struggle with equality as six of the eight people murdered in Atlanta were women of Asian descent. They were killed by a white male who claimed it was a result of his “sex addiction.” Surprisingly, some police officials refused to term the killings hate crimes and bought his assertion on his illness, with one official remarking the killer had a “bad day.” Really?

The Pew Research Center stated that since the pandemic took root in the U.S., nearly three-in-ten Asian Americans reported being subject to racial slurs or jokes. According to the organization Stop AAPI Hate, from March 19, 2020 to February 28, 2021, 3,795 occurrences of verbal harass-

ment, physical confrontations and other acts of hatred occurred here. It's believed that nearly half were in California, with Massachusetts ranking sixth in reported cases. Asian women were reportedly more than twice as likely as men to experience this mistreatment. And New York City police investigated 28 attacks on Asian Americans in 2020, nine times more than what occurred in 2019. Will we ever change those from thinking of difference as “the other?” Which, in most aspects, connotes less than.

Paul Watanabe, a Japanese American, directs UMass Boston's Institute for Asian American Studies spoke recently on the “other” in a radio interview with WBUR. He said of the omnipresent anti-Asian sentiment in the United States: “...Asian Americans have been in some ways treated in this fashion as the other; as perpetual foreigners.”

“Perpetual foreigners” who have helped to build this nation from the railroads to the cotton fields to Wall Street. So what is “the other?”

According to The Ethics Centre, the other is a term that gives comfort to racial and ethnic bigotry, classism and a nod to indifference and xenophobia.

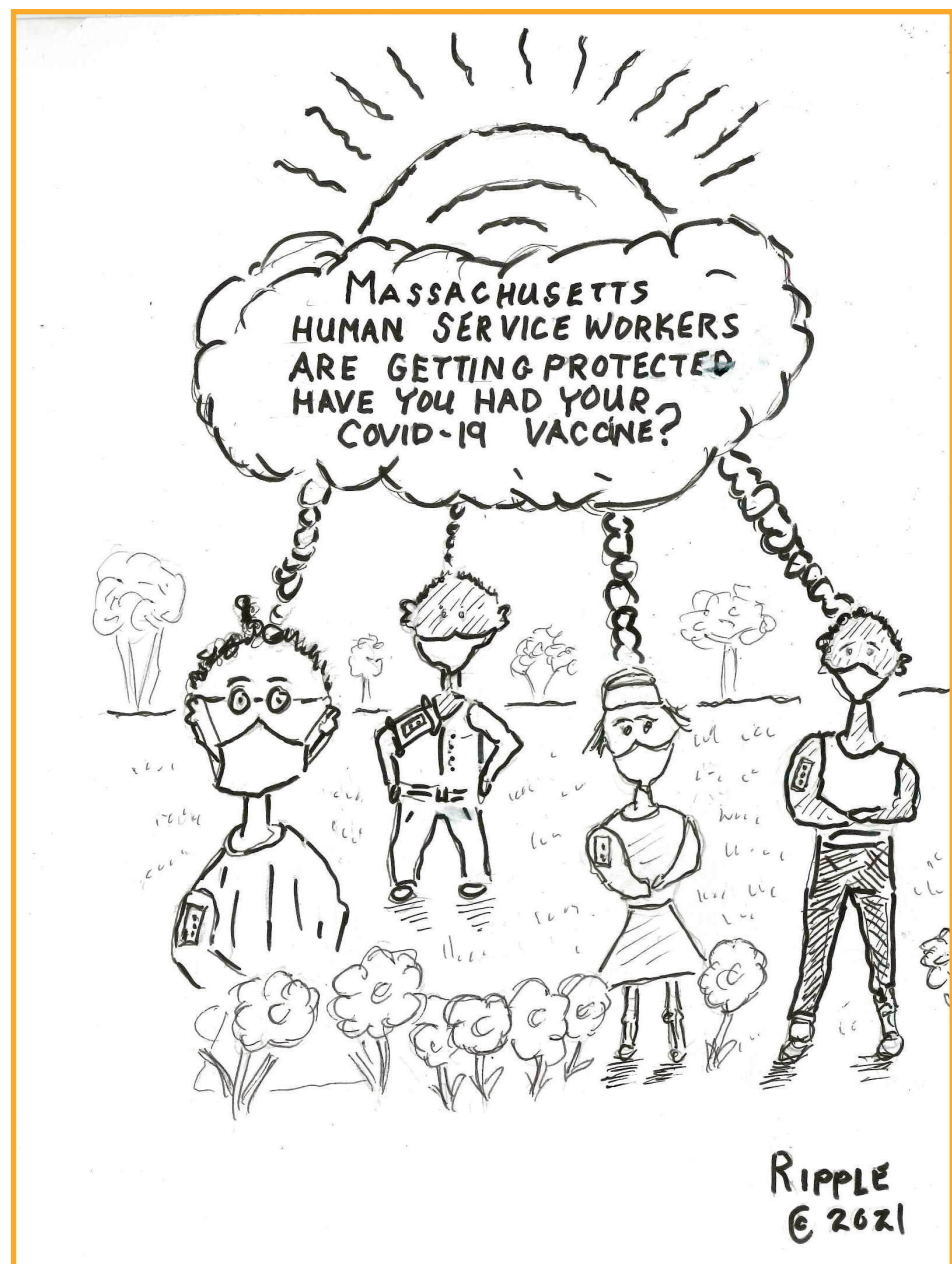
“One denotation of The Other is a term used to capture the ways other people are different from us. It's also used to describe the people who we keep distant from us because we decide they're not like us. The process of Othering occurs when we turn fellow humans into abstract entities we can distance ourselves from or treat as less-than-human,” the Centre said.

We must recognize that otherness and alterity have become convenient terms to rationalize or disguise racism and oppression. Words do matter.

So what can we do? First and foremost, we can speak up to bigotry and all forms of racism when the conversations describe “the other.” The truth is that all of us — other than Native Americans — arrived on this nation's shores, some involuntarily.

We now aspire this nation to live its creed of equality and work toward creating “a more perfect Union.” But it will take more actions from all of us to end the hatred of “the other.” In my view, to have allegiance with American ideals is to denounce othering.

For more information about actions to fight AAPI hate, visit the website of Stop AAPI Hate at www.stopaapihate.org/actnow.



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There is no vaccine for mental health. It takes a village

By Rebekah Roulier

As we know, the unrelenting pandemic and economic, political and racial strife of the past year have vastly impacted people - and our profession. While there is hope and encouragement with vaccines rolling out and spring rolling in, there is much work to be done on the mental health front given the fallout that we know will endure.

Most unfortunately, the effects on mental health among youth have become alarming. Mental Health America's annual State of Mental Health in America report released last fall shows that approximately 10 percent of U.S. youth have severe depression. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the period from April to October children's emergency department visits related to mental health increased by 24 percent for children aged 5-11 and 31 percent among adolescents aged 12-17 same period the previous year. These figures are staggering and likely underestimate the actual numbers as they don't reflect health-care visits outside of emergency departments.

Our mission at Doc Wayne Youth Services is to fuse sport and therapy to heal and strengthen at-risk youth that face difficulties associated with mental health, chronic trauma, and domestic or community violence. The programs occur in a gym or on a field (virtually during the pandemic) and clinicians referred to as "coaches" engage with youth ages 5-18, traveling to their schools, community centers and residential treatment settings.

Evidence-based and qualitative reporting has shown the sport-infused approach is successful as it uniquely fosters openness and trust and enables the development of new life skills and learning teamwork with the benefits of physical activity. While Doc Wayne has consistently had inquiries about training in our model over the years, unsurprisingly, the number escalated dramatically as COVID-19 took hold. Organizations from as far as Namibia in South Africa, where access to mental health clinicians can be limited, reached out.

For this reason, Doc Wayne

launched the Champions Network™ online training portal last September. It provides guidance on fundamental and trauma-informed mental health skills that leverage the sport-and-community-based therapies. The skills support the work of community organizations and individuals around the world, such as teachers, coaches, and clinicians, and the curriculum includes a sport-based therapy credentialing program for professionals and specialized training such as Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth Sport.

We are all so busy doing the work we do, supporting people over the coming years after such a challenging one will also require the help of nonprofessionals or "the village." Some members of the community, with fundamental training, are incredibly well-positioned to help, such as coaches.

With more than 45 million youth playing sports in the U.S., coaches can provide support, whether its teaching their athletes necessary coping and stress-reducing skills or spotting signs and symptoms when someone is struggling with mental health issues. And fortunately, others have recognized the escalating crisis and are starting to take steps to address it, among them employers and universities that are hosting workshops and summits that focus on self-care.

Professional mental health care and counseling will always be part of the support spectrum, as well as leveraging new tools, techniques and approaches. While the crises of last year have been tragic and difficult, there are some silver linings; mental health has been spotlighted like never before, and awareness is increasing on how vitally linked it is to overall health and wellbeing.

For that reason, it is an incredibly opportune time to engage people and organizations to ensure those who require support receive it. Equipping those not typically a part of the mental health system of care will also help to diminish the stigma associated with it and, ultimately, improve the quality of life for the entire village.

Rebekah Roulier, LMHC, is the deputy director of Doc Wayne Youth Services in Boston.

Mental health in schools: a higher priority than ever

By Suzy Langevin

If there's one lesson we can take away from the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on children and families, it's this: schools are an essential partner in maintaining kids' mental health.

Since the pandemic necessitated a shift to hybrid or virtual learning models, there have been reported increases in distress, depression and anxiety among students, alongside decreased motivation to engage in learning. The principles of trauma-informed practice tell us why this is true: to learn requires safety, and safety requires stability, predictability and trust.

When we're living through a period as uncertain as the past year has been, those items are in short supply - for educators, students and families. Systemic inequities make these effects even more pronounced in communities of color.

It leaves many of us in the mental health provider community with the question: what can we do to support these schools and these kids when and where they need it? At The Bridge Training Institute, a program of Open Sky Community Services in Worcester, the natural fit is to offer opportunities for training in key elements of supporting student mental health. Building upon relationships formed with numerous school districts that have used The Bridge Training Institute to train staff on implementing Dialectical Behavior Therapy in educational settings, this year, we broadened those efforts into the Mental Health in Schools Series.

Partnering with experts in the field, Fran Kuehn, LICSW, and Dr. Sharon Saline, PsyD, the Training Institute is offering a series of four full day workshops from February to May, covering topics like social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practice, and understanding the neurobiology that impacts student learning.

The Bridge Training Institute has provided over a decade worth of training to mental health and school professionals, traditionally offered in person, in a hotel ballroom. Just like educators have had to pivot to virtual methods to connect, so too has the Training Institute.

What started as a necessary adaptation to adhere to state event size limits and social distancing guidelines has led to greater access across the state, with

school systems from West Springfield to Nantucket able to be in the virtual room with these experts. Fran Kuehn even created a virtual background to mimic the conference space known so well!

The challenges before educators and schools are twofold: How to manage the current landscape of virtual or hybrid learning, and how to prepare for the return of students into physical classrooms as the threat of the pandemic subsides. When asked about the importance of understanding social-emotional health of students, Fran Kuehn said, "There's no learning without relationships. The schools that will be successful in navigating virtual learning and bringing students back into the classrooms will be the ones who focus on building strong, trusting relationships." These workshops will provide schools with skills to help foster all those crucial relationships: student to teacher, peer to peer, school to community.

School personnel are also managing their own understandable anxiety about the return to in-person learning and the challenges that re-integration will present. The Training Institute believes that knowledge is power, and in addition to these school specific workshops, we also have the opportunity to provide education that demystifies a number of complex topics, like suicide and professional ethics. By giving school personnel more tools about how to shape their school environments and their individual interventions, they will feel more empowered to make an impact. And empowerment is a trauma-informed practice principle in and of itself!

This pandemic has been traumatic for our entire community. While we tend to frame trauma as individual experiences, responses to trauma need to be systemic to make an impact. These trainers and workshops will give schools with what they need for a comprehensive approach to help kids, families and communities move beyond the pandemic and into a more resilient future.

Suzy Langevin, LICSW, LADC I, is the director of training & professional development at Open Sky Community Services.

The many meanings of autism awareness

By Karen Serra

I have to admit, I struggled when asked to write about autism awareness. I've been working with people with autism and their families for most of my career and over those years I've learned something new practically daily.

So, to me, "autism awareness" is a huge topic, seemingly impossible to encompass in 500 words. It has different meanings to different people, as well.

So, I decided to turn to the real experts: those who live with autism. I reached out to several autistic friends and put it to them. We talked about April being Autism Awareness Month and what autism awareness means to them and how it differs from the meaning professionals have.

I expanded the conversation to include parents and professionals. Ultimately, I spoke to ten people, and the truth is, autism awareness means something different to each of them.

It is important to note that I use the phrase "on the spectrum" because that is how most of the people in my per-

sonal life identify. There is an ongoing debate on what is the right thing to say: "a person with autism," "autistic" or "on the spectrum". There is a right and a wrong phrase, depending on the person at the center of the conversation. Those who participated in this organic and lively discussion identify as on the spectrum or autistic.

When I talked to professionals who support people with autism and their families, I learned that to them, autism awareness is really focused on advocacy at the state level. To them, it is about making sure that our state legislators understand what the community needs for supports. It's not about the individual at this level but more focused on the autism community as a whole and the framework of supports available. The overall goal is getting the decision-makers to understand the needs of the community and to allocate funds to support those.

For parents, it's about respect. For them they want people to understand that autism is not a disease nor a disorder. It's a neurological difference. They want the professionals who work

with their children to have a deep enough understanding of autism to ensure that their child is understood, appreciated and respected.

For families, a heightened awareness of autism may also mean that when they are in public people will be less judgmental of their child and their behavior. With more understanding of autism, they hope that their friends and family will respect their need to sometimes leave a function early because their child is not doing well. Autism awareness helps people remember that not all disabilities are visible.

For the autistic people I spoke to, autism awareness means taking the time to understand how they tick. And from that understanding comes an expanded awareness of abilities and different ways of being in the world.

They want teachers to take the time to how they learn best and to recognize and appreciate their unique perspective. "We not asking to be treated specially," said one friend. "We are just asking to be treated with grace and patience."

I'll leave the last word on autism awareness to another friend, who says it better than I ever could:

"Autism awareness means that people can recognize that while living with autism can be hard because we experience the world differently in a world not built for us, it doesn't mean they should teach autistic people differently or think of them as less capable than anyone else," he said. "When autistic people contribute their perspectives of how they experience life it really adds so much value that would be missing without us. Some people thing we just 'see the world differently,' which is a really simple way of saying that we perceive, feel and experience everything in life differently. The problem is sometimes this ends up being a complete inability to see things they way a neurotypical person does, which can be really frustrating to deal with or understand from a neurotypical perspective."

Karen Serra is director of Autism Connections, a program of Pathlight.



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1/20

A VIEW FROM THE HILL

*A commentary from a
legislator on human services*



The time is right to improve Mass. transportation for all

By Rep. Sally Kerans

If you've ever driven past the mall in Danvers on the north shore, you've likely seen a few large, empty buses. These MBTA buses bring people to our malls, but come through the center of town, often empty, even well before COVID-19 hit.

The three bus lines that go through Danvers - the 465, the 436, and the 435 - largely take passengers between the North Shore Mall and the Liberty Tree Mall. While some people do use these bus routes, the current routes are not the most efficient or productive for our town. The buses cannot take you to North Shore Community College. They cannot take you directly to the Salem Depot or the Beverly Depot. Just recently, the MBTA made the decision to suspend the 465 bus altogether, saying the T's financial situation requires such cuts. This is in dispute. The town of Danvers pays the MBTA well over \$500,000 each year, and in exchange, we get services that fall short.

As a lifelong Danvers resident, I have watched these often completely empty buses roll across my town for years and thought that there must be a way to finally create bus routes that best serve the current riders, our town and its residents. I don't want to eliminate these routes; rather, I want to make them work for everyone. It's time to think more creatively and to re-configure our bus routes. We need to make these routes work for our residents as well as for those coming to Danvers.

Strategic transportation policy decisions charge our economy and support our small businesses. It has been my priority since being elected last November to work with the MBTA to craft routes that serve riders' needs, including Danvers residents.

In November 2020, just after I was elected, I spoke at a public forum urging the MBTA to consider making changes to these routes. Later this month, I will meet with the MBTA's Bus Network Redesign Task Force to continue to push for these changes, keeping in mind that if there are people who depend on these buses to get to Danvers to work, we must find a way to meet their needs while also getting people directly to a train depot. I am hopeful that these discussions will lead to routes that better serve our community.

Re-configuring these bus routes will improve the quality of life and commute for many of our workers, particularly the many human service and health workers who live and work in our town.

This re-configuration must also take into account the needs of our community and aspire to a greater vision. Why can't our buses bring riders directly to a train, so that rather than facing the arduous commute into Boston, riders could instead enjoy a more predictable and smooth journey?

Why can't our buses bring students to North Shore Community College, so that more of our residents can access the campus that does not currently connect to any public transit service?

Why can't we provide a more efficient service for those who rely on public transportation to get to work?

These changes would help spur our local economy and would lead to greater ridership, so that more of our community could use and take advantage of public transportation. I will also ensure that those who truly depend on the services in their current form will not be left out in the cold, and I will continue to speak for them, too.

While this particular issue may impact my district, the broader theme of better, more strategic transportation policy impacts us all. Reimagining our transportation system to be fairer, greener, more accessible, and more flexible should be a top priority of the state, especially given the urgency of addressing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Now is the time to undertake this effort. Our state will have access to funds from the American Rescue Plan, and we must begin to fully invest in our transportation system. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated many of these problems, and we now find ourselves at a crossroads where we are forced to re-evaluate our broader transportation policy. We have an opportunity to fundamentally transform our transportation system into a tool that will not only spur our economy but will help us combat climate change and create a fairer, more equitable Commonwealth. What began as a cost-cutting measure by the MBTA has opened up an opportunity for my district and the people who live here to gain access to effective public transportation.

Rep. Sally Kerans represents the 13th Essex District

The opinions expressed in A View from the Hill and Viewpoints from Across the State are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Providers' Council or its members.

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RESCUE: Federal plan offers more PPP options, UI extensions and employee retention credits for nonprofits

Continued from Page 1

percent to 75 percent. The new law also provides continued coverage for self-employed workers and staff of religious and very small nonprofits.

Those types of nonprofits are also eligible for up to \$10 million in the first draw of PPP and would be eligible for the second draw if they meet revenue decline criteria and slightly smaller employee threshold of 300 at a particular location. To be eligible for the second draw of the PPP, organizations must show a 25 percent reduction in revenue compared to the same quarter a year ago.

Nonprofits that are newly eligible for the second draw of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) will have an additional two months to apply for the relief funds, through the end of May 2021, federal officials said.

The PPP deadline extension was vitally important, according to David Thompson, vice president of public policy at the National Council of Nonprof-

its. "All the work put into advocating for expansion of the PPP to larger nonprofits would have been lost without this extension," he said.

The rescue plan expanded the PPP to cover larger nonprofits and provide "a significant source of aid for some of those nonprofits serving their communities but not able to access existing small business or other aid programs at the moment," said Bharat Ramamurti, deputy director of National Economic Council during a recent White House briefing for nonprofits across the nation attended by Providers' Council staff.

The law also provides supports to increase AmeriCorps volunteers to respond to communities impacted by COVID-19 and allows \$350 billion in local and state aid. Funding may offer "assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries," and services that governments cut due to declines in revenue brought or investments in water, sewer or broadband infrastructure.

While the new law does not expand

incentives for charitable giving, separate proposed legislation could allow taxpayers who claim the standard deduction, rather than itemizing deductions, on their tax returns to take a deduction for charitable giving valued at up to one-third of the standard deduction (around \$4,000 for an individual filer and \$8,000 for married joint filers) for tax years 2021 and 2022.

Another important provision for nonprofits to consider is the Employee Retention Tax Credit (ERTC), which was created by the CARES Act in late March 2020.

For organizations that don't meet the PPP thresholds, there are still "significant relief options available," Ramamurti said. The ERTC can cover "a significant chunk of payroll costs" — up to \$7,000 per employee per quarter, he said. Employers applying for and receiving PPP Second Draw loans can also claim the expanded ERTC. However, similar rules apply that prevent payroll costs that are eligible for the ERTC to be eligible for PPP loan forgiveness and vice versa.

SUFFOLK: Apply by May 28

Continued from Page 1

key areas so that students can immediately apply what they are learning in the classroom to their work in the field.

Graduates say the program has had a meaningful impact on their knowledge and ability to excel in their careers.

"I have a much better understanding of how a non-profit should effectively operate. It has made me feel more invested in my own organization and given me the confidence to speak to areas of opportunity," said Meredith Graf, a human resources generalist at Northeast Arc and 2020 graduate of the Council's Certificate program.

Students who successfully complete this program and who already have a bachelor's degree may be eligible to transfer credits toward a graduate degree. Students may earn the equivalent to nearly one-third of the credits needed for a master's of public administration, giving them a jump start on the credits, time and cost associated with pursuing a master's degree.

The deadline to apply for the Certificate Program is Friday, May 28. See www.providers.org/alex for more information and application forms.

Questions? Contact Eliza Adams at eadams@providers.org or 508.598.9700.



In wake of Atlanta attacks, Council issues statement urging anti-racist actions and training

In the wake of recent tragic and violent killings of members of the Asian community in Atlanta, The Providers' Council denounced the violence against members of the Asian community and on behalf of the community-based human services sector in Massachusetts.

The Council also called for a renewed commitment to anti-racist practices, education and policies. The Council's *Call to Action on Racial Equity*, developed last year by its Race, Diversity & Inclusion Committee and supported by more than 80 member agencies, said: "As members of the

human service community, an integral part of our nation, it is essential to have equity and justice for all people of color and for all people in need of support ... We call on all providers, their staff members and supporters of the human services sector to action in working against oppression, being antiracist and bringing justice to our communities."

"As change leaders we ask you to not only speak against racism, but also to be antiracist and actively work to combat racism and systemic inequality. It's up to us to lead efforts to bring about social justice. We must act now.

We don't have any more time to wait."

"And as the Council commended the recent Boston Arts Commission's approval advancing King Boston's Embrace Memorial on the Boston Common, we must demand that racial respect, equity and justice remains an incontrovertible cornerstone of our humanity," said Council President & CEO Michael Weekes.

"We join together with President Biden and Vice President Harris and the many other Americans who stand in support of our sisters and brothers of Asian descent."



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS • SPRING 2021

What:	Providers' Council 46th Annual Membership & Business Meeting	What:	Free, Members-Only Northern Massachusetts University Roundtable
When:	Wednesday, April 7	When:	Tuesday, April 20 to June 22
Time:	10:30 a.m.	Time:	10 a.m. to noon
Where:	via Zoom	Where:	via Zoom
Followed by:	<i>Untapped Talent: Panel Discussion on Supporting Career Development Needs of the BIPOC and Foreign-Born Work force from noon to 1:30 p.m.</i>	Panelists:	Brian MacKenna-Rice, Coordinator for Human Services, Northern Essex Community College Dale McLennan, Dean, Internship and Career Center, Endicott College Melisa Alves, Director, Career Services & Advising Center, Fitchburg State University Samantha Medina, Director of Employer Engagement, Merrimack College
Panelists:	Emmanuel Owusu, Executive Director, African Bridge Network Jule Gomes Noack, President and CEO, HMEA Peter Obour-Mensah, Manager, Baycove Housing Support Program Evans Chiyombwe, Senior Program Director, Victory Human Services Hillary Bradburn, Education Manager, International Institute of New England Moderated by Pam Sampson, Chief Program Officer, Venture Community Services		
Cost:	\$25 minimum donation to support graduate scholarship fund for a foreign-born professional within the human services sector	What:	SOLD OUT! Spring 2021 Certificate in Supervision Series
		When:	Tuesday, April 20 to June 22
		Time:	9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
		Where:	via Zoom
		Trainers:	Jim Ognibene, Visioneer Consulting
		Cost:	\$600 members; \$900 non-members
What:	Free, Members-Only Webinar: Success Planning Requires Succession Planning	What:	Introduction to Disability, Ableism & Creating Inclusive Spaces
When:	Wednesday, April 14	When:	Thursday, April 22
Time:	10 to 11 a.m.	Time:	9 a.m.
Where:	via Zoom	Where:	via Zoom
Trainers:	David Harris, Managing Partner, Interim Executive Solutions Demetriouse Russell, Chief Executive Officer, Venn Diagram Partners LLC	Trainers:	Piper Slowinski, National Inclusion Manager, Partners for Youth with Disabilities
		Cost:	\$70 members; \$130 non-members

*Pre-registration for these events required unless otherwise noted.
Visit www.provider.org/events to learn more and register.
Questions? Contact Eliza Adams at 508.598.9700 or eadams@providers.org*

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