

### Council celebrates 50 Years of Impact: launching Academy for Learning and Exchange (ALEX)

The Providers' Council is turning 50 in 2025, and we're proud to be *Celebrating 50 Years of Impact* with our dedicated members and partners. As part of this milestone, *The Provider* will feature a year-long series highlighting some of the Council's most significant achievements. This month, we're spotlighting the creation of the Academy for Learning and Exchange, more commonly known as ALEX.

The Council announced it would be launching a new portal to host its edu-

ALEX, see page 7

### Council and several members march with BCIL at the ADA35 Rally and March



On July 23, the Providers' Council and The Caring Force marched with providers, human services workers and persons served at the ADA35 Rally and March sponsored by Council member **Boston Center for Independent Living**.

The march was a celebration of the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and took place in Boston, starting at City Plaza and ending at the Boston Common. **Advocates, WORK Inc., Vinfen** and other providers also participated in the march. The event was a powerful reminder of the ongoing fight for disability rights and the importance of community in advancing equity, inclusion and access for all.

### Council offers expanded workshop selection at 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention & Expo



Fred Destromp (left) and Melissa Langham (right) converse during a workshop at the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention & Expo: Envision the Possibilities, held in 2024.

Empowering human services professionals through learning is one of the core tenets of the Council's mission — and this year's 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention & Expo: *50 Years Together: Celebrating Today, Shaping Tomorrow* will provide countless opportunities for human services workers to learn, connect and grow their skills at the largest human services conference in the Northeast.

The landmark convening will take place on Monday, October 6 at the Marriott Co-

pley Place Hotel in Boston. This year, in honor of the Council's golden anniversary, the organization is excited to present new opportunities for attendees to gain knowledge, build skills and connect with other human services professionals across the Commonwealth.

"We are excited to be offering the largest amount of workshops in our organization's history," said Ann Schuler, direc-

WORKSHOPS, see page 7

### Providers' Council partners with USI, Venteur to launch ICHRA offering for members

The Providers' Council recently announced a partnership with USI Insurance and Venteur designed at expanding access to affordable and high-quality health insurance coverage for community-based human services organizations and their employees through an individual coverage health reimbursement arrangement (ICHRA).

"This partnership is about giving our Providers' Council members an option to secure health insurance for their dedicated workers," said Bill Yelenak, President/CEO of the Providers' Council. "With support from Ven-


teur and USI, we're providing an essential benefit to these workers as they strengthen caring communities across Massachusetts."

Venteur is a health benefits platform that helps employers offer ICHRAs. This partnership brings together Venteur's personalized health technology, USI's wide range of insurance options, and the Providers' Council's vision to strengthen the human services workforce.

With Venteur's ICHRA solution, employers put tax-free dollars into a health ac-

PARTNERSHIP, see page 7

### Governor Healey appoints Dr. Kiame Mahaniah as health and human services secretary



Dr. Kiame Mahaniah has become the new EOHHS secretary.

In July, Gov. Maura Healey appointed Dr. Kiame Mahaniah as the Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

Mahaniah replaces former EOHHS secretary Kate Walsh, who will remain a part of the administration as a senior advisor to Governor Healey. In his new role, Mahaniah will lead a team of more than 23,000 staff across 11 agencies and the MassHealth program.

"We congratulate Dr. Kiame Mahaniah on his recently appointed role as Massachusetts' Secretary of Health and Human Services," said Melinda Matthews, president and CEO of Eliot Community Human Services. "Dr. Mahaniah is a compassionate health equity leader who is deeply committed to coordinated and integrated medical and behavioral care."

Mahaniah has served as undersecretary of Health for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) since April 2023. He is a practicing physician in the field of addiction and primary care. He has continued to see patients as undersecretary and plans to continue to practice in his new position. Previously, Mahaniah served as CEO of Lynn Community Health Center, where he led the transition into value-based care.

"As the Lynn Community Health Center Medical Director and then CEO, Dr. Mahaniah was a terrific partner as the City of Lynn worked its way through COVID and beyond," said Kathryn C. Burns, MHA, CEO at Greater Lynn Se-

MAHANAIH, see page 7



## Vinfen names Jonathan Chines as Chief Operating Officer

On August 13, Vinfen announced the appointment of Jonathan Chines as chief operating officer (COO).

In his new role, Jonathan will oversee Vinfen's operational divisions, including Community-Based Mental Health, Developmental Services, Brain Injury, Behavioral Health, Integrated Care and all services across Massachusetts and Connecticut. He joins the executive team under President & CEO Jean Yang and collaborates closely with the senior leadership to advance Vinfen's mission of promoting recovery, resiliency, habilitation, and self-determination.

Prior to joining Vinfen, he held leadership positions at Atrius Health, Reliant Medical Group and Optum, where he played a pivotal role in shaping growth strategies and legislative advocacy across Massachusetts health systems.

## YMCA of Greater Boston appoints Kait Rogers as chief financial officer

On July 28, YMCA of Greater Boston (YGB) announced the appointment of Kait Rogers as the organization's next chief financial officer.

Rogers joins YGB from the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston (JCC), where she served for seven years as chief financial and operations officer, overseeing finance, operations, human resources, risk, facilities and information systems.

Prior to the JCC, Rogers held senior finance and operations roles at Citizen Schools, a national nonprofit focused on educational equity.



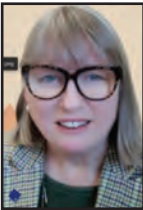
Jonathan Chines

## Advocates welcomes Tara McCabe as new senior vice president of advancement

On June 1, 2025, Advocates welcomed Tara McCabe as its new senior vice president of advancement.

In her role, she will lead philanthropy, grant development, marketing, and communications — functions that are essential to fueling the organization's mission, expanding its reach and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Most recently she served as chief development officer at Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA) Boston, where she spearheaded philanthropy and marketing and communications initiatives.



Tara McCabe

## Liberty Bank Foundation and Square One team up to support workforce development

Liberty Bank Foundation recently donated \$10,000 to Square One in support of its Learn & Earn Workforce Development initiative, a program that provides young families with the education and training they need to build their careers and establish a successful foundation for their families.

Through partnerships with Holyoke Community College and area employers, Learn & Earn participants receive HiSET education support and paid workforce training.

In addition to receiving support from the Liberty Bank Foundation and others, the program is largely funded through a grant from MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board.

## The Home for Little Wanderers announces new board officers and members

On August 6, The Home for Little Wanderers announced the appointment of its newly elected board of directors'

## House of Possibilities receives \$5 million grant from the Yawkey Foundation



Breaking ground at the House of Possibilities are, from left, Katie Terino, president and CEO of House of Possibilities; Alicia Verity, CEO of the Yawkey Foundation; and Deb McNulty, from the Yawkey Foundation Board of Trustees.

On July 27, House of Possibilities (HOPE) announced a \$5 million grant from Yawkey Foundation, positioning the organization to transform its facilities at Stonehill College in Easton and the services it provides there.

The Yawkey Foundation's investment will help fund construction of a new 15,000 sq. ft. building and renovations to the existing 11,000 sq. ft. The renovations will allow HOPE to increase its capacity to support people with disabilities and their families throughout Southeastern Massachusetts.

officers and members. These additions further strengthen the governance, reach and strategic direction of the organization.

The Home's board officers include, Damon Hart, board chair and executive vice president and chief legal officer at Liberty Mutual Insurance; Jeff Keffer, board treasurer and chairman of the board at Mountain State Energy Holdings, LLC; and Katelyn O'Brien, board secretary and partner at Proskauer.

The newly elected board officers and members bring a wide range of expertise in finance, communication, marketing,

healthcare, and more. The Home's newly appointed board members include Anne Donahue, vice president of employer and advisor marketing at Fidelity Investments; Shelley Duncan, national managing partner of the Office of Multi-Disciplinary Model at Deloitte; Julie Hall, founder & CEO of Communitas Global; Tim Kierstead, co-founder of Northern Star Advisors; Ian Macduff, managing director at Natixis Investment Managers; Brian Mulroy, chief financial officer at Semrush; and Emily Trent, SVP and director of marketing for TJ Maxx and Marshall, The TJX Companies.



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# PROVIDER PROFILES

## PARENTING JOURNEY

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### About the Agency

Parenting Journey is a nonprofit training institute serving agencies and clinicians by helping parents build stronger, more resilient families.

The organization supports family service professionals by:

- Partnering with parent-and family-serving organizations to provide transformative experiences through trauma and stressor-informed programs
- Engaging professionals/para-professionals working with families to discern and build on the strengths of those they serve
- Equipping clinicians to incorporate therapeutic strategies into their practice

The Family Center opened its doors in 1982, in Somerville. At first, the clinical staff worked directly with families, learning about and responding to those families' immediate and pressing needs. After 15 years of partnership with local residents, Parenting Journey was born — first in a direct services context, then later evolving into a training institute.

In FY '26, Parenting Journey's operating budget stands at \$2.5 million. Its modest fee-based structure is so due to long-standing and generous individual donors and foundation support. Likewise, the organization continues to treasure key collaborative and contractual relationships with child welfare agencies including the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families.

### A new way to parent: Parenting Journey transforms family dynamics

In Parenting Journey, parents explore connections between how they were parented and how they are parenting. They continue positive parenting practices, while developing insight around unhealthy patterns. Parents then replace those patterns with healthy, strength-based parenting approaches. Impact is measured using the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework and additional parental stress measures: hope and optimism, insight, identifying personal goals, self-efficacy, self-nurturing ability, self-awareness and social networks. 73% of parents experience improvements in three or more impact measures. This is noted in a study published by Families, Systems and Health in 2020, titled *Impact of a Community-Delivered Parenting Curriculum on Perceived Parenting Stress and Parent-Reported Outcomes in a Low-Income Diverse Population*. This comparison study was conducted in partnership with ABCD Head Start by researchers from Boston Medical Center, Cambridge Health Alliance and University of California, Berkely. This and related impacts show that Parenting Journey's strategies work.

Parenting Journey's core curriculum, Parenting Journey 1, is evidence-based and designed to help parents and caregivers understand past experiences and present realities, share their attitudes and beliefs as parents and influence how they engage with their children. Parenting Journey 2 helps parents and caregivers to focus on goal setting and implementation of key learnings from Parenting Journey 1. Four additional evidence-informed curricula focus on specialized areas of parenting:

- **Parenting Journey Fathers:** designed to help fathers and father figures improve their relationships with their children and family while becoming the dad they aspire to be.
- **Parenting Journey in Recovery:** offering



Parenting Journey gives parents a new frame of reference to rethink parenting.

parents and caregivers living with addiction support as they maintain their recovery while building strong, positive relationships with their children.

- **Parenting in America:** focused on helping parents honor their cultural heritage while also developing new culturally responsive practices and strategies.
- **My Journey:** designed to equip those aged 14+ with the skills and self-awareness to foster healthier relationships and to proactively prioritize self-care.

Parenting Journey parent groups are 10 to 12-week, cohort-based groups that allow parents to engage in an experiential model supported by clinical underpinnings. The curricula were developed by clinicians working directly with parents and families in community-based settings and private practice. Parenting Journey's life-changing strategies have been adapted across cultures, generations and contexts. The organization has trained facilitators all over the world including over 700 nonprofit partners across the US and internationally. Over 55,000 parents have participated in Parenting Journey's programs furthering its vision of a world where all families and communities thrive.

### Executive Leadership

Monica L. Zeno-Martin is the executive director at Parenting Journey. She is committed to collaborating with individuals, communities, NGOs and businesses in developing solutions to challenges facing marginalized groups and communities. Monica partners on efforts ranging from social justice to trauma-centered care, education and workforce development.



Monica L. Zeno-Martin

Prior to her role at Parenting Journey, Zeno-Martin was chief program officer and executive vice president at the Institute for Nonprofit Practice. Previously, she worked with YouthBuild Global (formerly YouthBuild USA, Inc.), where, among other roles, she served as chief program officer and as vice president of global partnerships. Zeno-Martin holds an Ed.M. from Harvard University and a B.S. in Business Administration from Florida A&M University. She serves on the boards of several nonprofits, including The Center for Teen Empowerment and Origin Nation Cultural Arts Center.

Now, entering her fourth year at Parenting Journey, Zeno-Martin is excited about the organization's recent rebrand, and its strategic plan focused on increased impact through deeper partnerships in the areas of practice and policy, growth at the local, national, and global levels, and Parenting Journey's improved support to its implementing partner as a convener and sharer of best and promising practices.

## SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

### Susan Mirembe, a caring staff member

Susan Mirembe, a direct support professional in **Opportunities for Inclusion's (OFI)** Day Habilitation Program, is known for her patient, calm and caring approach toward her work and the individuals for whom she cares. In her three years with OFI, she has mainly worked with a group of individuals with profound disabilities, most of whom are nonverbal and use wheelchairs.

Working alongside a case manager and other staff, Mirembe's daily duties encompass assisting individuals with their personal exercise and other goals, preparing food that may need to be cut or ground and assisting individuals with eating. Mirembe also assists individuals with enrichment activities such as painting and crafts. Enrichment activities are mostly conducted hand over hand, and Mirembe encourages everyone to bring out their best artistic talents. At other times, Mirembe can be found cheering participants on with amusing sports play like soft bowling — or simply encouraging someone to dance or smile back at her.

"I love working with these individuals because they are so real," Mirembe explained. She finds working with clients extremely rewarding as they appreciate all she does for them and, even though many are nonverbal, they find ways to show their approval. "They make me appreciate life," she said.

"Working alongside great staff has made it easy to work for the organization and with the participants," she added.

Mark Beaumont, interim president and CEO of Opportunities for Inclusion, acknowledged Mirembe's calming and effective approach in working with individuals in our programs. "Susan is a valued direct



Susan Mirembe is a DSP at Opportunities for Inclusion's day habilitation program.

support staff member and someone you want on your team," he said. "She goes above and beyond for the individuals she serves. She shows caring and respect for the individuals and other staff she works with and is always professional."

Mirembe is a native of Uganda, emigrating to the United States in 2016. In Uganda, she studied fashion design and continues to be involved in fashion in her free time. Her designs have been featured in local fashion shows and on her Instagram page. Mirembe also brings her culture into her job by occasionally cooking Ugandan food during group cooking sessions.

### Tranace Peebles dedication to Family Independence spans decades

Tranace Peebles has been a dedicated direct care staff member at **Family Independence**, since 1997. She began working at Family Services of Greater Boston and stayed on the team when the organization transitioned to Family Independence, Inc. in 2017. For over 28 years, Peebles has shown unwavering commitment to the success and well-being of families served. Peebles is widely recognized by her colleagues as "supportive, always willing to jump in and help [and a person who] takes initiative to support both staff and clients."

As a shift leader, Peebles brings a unique ability to connect with and support at-risk young parents, many of whom face significant life challenges and traumas. Her empathy, patience and calm presence make her extremely effective at crisis prevention and de-escalating situations.

Peebles has shown her passion for the growth and success of Family Independence throughout her career. She is a voice for change, consistently contributing innovative ideas and advocating for both clients and staff.

She actively collaborates with community partners to provide service opportunities for families, including participating in events such as the AIDS Walk, Breast Cancer Walk, Mother's Day Walk for Peace and the Walk for Hunger.

In addition to her leadership responsibilities, Peebles facilitates weekly groups focused on vision



Tranace Peebles has been a dedicated direct support professional for decades.

boards, health and wellness. These sessions foster team building, personal growth and development for our families.

Peebles sums up her approach to care beautifully: "I come to work every day with an open heart, open mind, and to lead with compassion. I also listen with understanding."

Her dedication has not gone unnoticed — Peebles is a valuable and inspiring member of the Family Independence team.



# EDITORIAL



**William Yelenak**  
President / Publisher

## Nonprofit nonpartisanship vital to nonprofit integrity

More than 70 years ago as the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress was about to adjourn for the Fourth of July holiday in 1954, then-United States Senator Lyndon B. Johnson from Texas introduced an amendment to a bill updating the tax code, and it was included without any discussion or debate. The Poynter Institute has the details:

“A conservative nonprofit group that wanted to limit the treaty-making ability of the president produced material that called for electing his primary opponent, millionaire rancher-oilman Dudley Dougherty, and defeating Johnson. There was no church involved.

“Johnson, then Democratic minority leader, responded by introducing an amendment to Section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code dealing with tax-exempt charitable organizations, including groups organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, literacy and educational purposes, or to prevent cruelty to children or animals. It said, in effect, that if you want to be absolved from paying taxes, you couldn’t be involved in partisan politics.”

And with that, the so-called Johnson Amendment was born.

The principle that 501(c)(3) nonprofits remain nonpartisan has been a fundamental part of these organizations for more than 70 years. While there have been challenges to the Johnson Amendment over the years, including during the first Trump administration, the law has remained — ensuring nonprofits remain nonpartisan and ensuring tax-deductible donations to public charities and houses of worship aren’t used for political reasons.

But almost 71 years to the day after LBJ worked the Johnson Amendment into the federal tax code, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) proposed a different interpretation of the law. The IRS in July said churches and houses of worship have the right to endorse political candidates to their congregations in response to a lawsuit brought by two Texas churches. The IRS said endorsing a candidate would be like “a family discussion concerning candidates” and concluded it was allowable.

“Thus, communications from a house of worship to its congregation in connection with religious services through its usual channels of communication on matters of faith do not run afoul of the Johnson Amendment as properly interpreted,” the IRS wrote.

Overturning this ban on nonprofit nonpartisanship is shortsighted, dangerous and could allow nonprofits — trusted partners in their communities — to become politicized, endorse candidates and attack their opponents. It would allow political donors to funnel tax-deductible donations into campaigns, eroding trust in nonprofits. And trust is the critical piece — nonprofits work because people trust them to serve residents of the communities where they are — not politicians.

Diane Yentel, the president/CEO of the National Council of Nonprofits, perhaps put it best in a statement shortly after the IRS ruling.

“The court filing is deeply concerning, furthering an assault on the bedrock principle that charitable organizations must remain nonpartisan in law, fact, and purpose in order to serve their missions and communities. ... The decree could open the floodgates for political operatives to funnel money to their preferred candidates while receiving generous tax breaks at the expense of taxpayers who may not share those views. Charitable nonprofits are among the few remaining trusted spaces where people come together across differences to solve community problems, and undermining the law that protects their nonpartisanship could severely damage the integrity and effectiveness of the entire sector.”

Diane’s words are important, and these are concerns shared by me and other nonprofit leaders across our state and country. The IRS exemption, so far, has a narrower view on an exemption for churches and houses of worship rather than all nonprofits. But it’s a slippery slope and one that we much watch carefully because of the potential problems this ruling creates.

For example, what’s to prevent anyone from starting their own church or religious congregation, obtaining a 501(c)(3) exemption, creating a web platform or YouTube streaming “religious service,” and using that platform and audience to solicit tax-exempt donations that would be used for partisan purposes? The IRS ruling truly has the potential to upend a law that has protected nonprofit nonpartisanship for more than seven decades.

That’s why the Providers’ Council is joining more than 1,000 other charitable nonprofits this summer — including the National Council of Nonprofits, the American Humanist Association, Independent Sector, Interfaith Alliance, Public Citizen among them — to co-sign a community letter to defend nonprofit nonpartisanship. The letter will be sent to President Trump, urging the administration to revise its current stance and protect the Johnson Amendment.

“Weakening the Johnson Amendment would jeopardize the integrity of the entire nonprofit community,” the letter read in part. “This proposed legal action is alarming, as it escalates a broader effort to dismantle the longstanding expectation that charitable organizations stay above the political fray in both practice and principle.”

In your conversations with the Massachusetts Congressional delegation and other elected officials, please stress with them how critical it is to protect nonprofit nonpartisanship, ensuring that we keep our missions separate from partisan politics. Our nonprofits are trusted partners in the community, providing critical services where they may not otherwise exist, and it’s critical that our consumers trust us to provide essential services without any political bias or partisan leaning. We hope the administration will reconsider the IRS ruling in this instance and preserve nonprofit nonpartisanship for houses of worship and public charities for years to come.



Students at the May Center School for Autism and Developmental Disabilities in Randolph recently took part in a very special art project — creating portraits of a favorite person. Guided by art teacher Laurie Matthews, students created a vibrant collection of one-of-a-kind, 9”x12” portraits celebrating the people who make the students’ lives brighter.

From upper left to bottom right, the portraits are titled as follows: Dad, created by Liam; Family Member, created by Paul; Friend, created by Davi; Father, created by Justin; Mom, created by Owen; and Teacher, created by Harshith.

**Want to highlight the artwork of your program participants? Contact Maureen at [mlynch@providers.org](mailto:mlynch@providers.org) for more information.**



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## The next generation isn't waiting: How college students are driving impact in our communities

By Kelley Tuthill, Ed.D

College students are often referred to as the next generation of change-makers. Yet for many non-profit organizations, tomorrow's leaders are today's lifeline in delivering solutions to the critical issues facing individuals and families in our communities.

I had the honor this year of serving as commencement speaker for Merrimack College's School of Education & Social Policy. Many of these graduates are entering fields where they'll become social workers, teachers and counselors. What impressed me wasn't just their dedication to professions that contribute to the greater good — it was how many discovered their calling through transformative volunteer during college, similar to the service-learning opportunities I was fortunate enough to participate in as an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame.

Like most nonprofits, Catholic Charities Boston relies on the generosity of partners, volunteers and donors to help carry out our mission. As one of the most comprehensive social services providers in the state, we address key challenges facing our communities, providing food, shelter, resources, affordable childcare and legal advocacy while creating pathways to job and housing security. Rising costs continue to strain budgets for many working families throughout Eastern Massachusetts. At the same time, federal, state funding and program cuts create uncertainty about program sustainability. We are preparing for an alarming increase in demand for services at a time when our resources are constricting.

Despite these challenges, we remain committed to being a source of stability and hope. What gives me hope lately is

witnessing a remarkable community response, particularly from young people ready to make a difference.

Each Thanksgiving, Boston College student-athletes and student leaders mobilize to prepare bountiful bags for nearly 4,500 families facing food insecurity. In December, students from various local universities can be found spreading holiday cheer in our emergency family shelters and helping to organize and distribute donations for children across our shelter, childcare and after-school programs.

Yet community needs extend far beyond the holiday season. Our team of 425 employees annually serves nearly 100,000 individuals across more than 20 locations in Eastern Massachusetts. Our mission calls us to recognize the inherent dignity of each person and our shared responsibility to care for the most vulnerable. Without volunteers filling essential gaps — stocking food pantries, engaging with children in shelters, providing consistent presence — we simply couldn't sustain the breadth and depth of care our communities desperately need.

A generous donor recognized the vital role volunteers play in program sustainability. Thanks to their vision, we have been able to build out a robust volunteer program, transforming the way we approach our volunteer engagement and strengthening relationships with community and college partners. This extended commitment exemplifies something powerful: by giving students meaningful roles in our work, we're educating the very people who will become tomorrow's policymakers, business leaders and social innovators.

This idea was illustrated this summer

*STUDENTS, see page 6*

## Where recovery meets heritage: A celebration of courage and community

By Emily Stewart

September holds a profound place in the heart of Casa Esperanza. Across the country, it is recognized as National Recovery Month, a time to honor the courage and perseverance of people living in recovery. It is also the start of Hispanic Heritage Month, when we celebrate the histories, rich cultures and contributions of people whose roots reach across Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. At Casa Esperanza, these two observances converge in a way that speaks to our mission and identity. Casa's 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduation is more than a ceremony. It is a moment when our community gathers to recognize hard-won milestones and to honor the people who made them possible.

On Friday, September 19, our Roxbury campus at 291 Eustis Street will come alive with the sights and sounds and scents of celebration. The air will carry music and the smells of our favorite foods prepared and shared in community. Laughter will rise and mingle with the hum of conversation, creating the pulse that emerges when hundreds gather with a shared sense of purpose. More than 300 patients, alumni, families, neighbors and community partners will join us, with state representatives lending their words of wisdom and inspiration to the day. From the weight of heartfelt speeches to the lightness of dancing, graduation holds moments of pure joy and those so profound you can feel the entire community taking a collective breath. These are the moments that anchor our mission — and motivate and mobilize us all year through.

The words of our graduates tell the story:

"I love this place, I feel safe. The people here don't judge you. I feel like part of a family," said Tommy, speaking to the power of belonging. Angel shared, "I have had a growth in my mind, in my heart, and now I am calm in my recovery." Omayra expressed it simply and powerfully: "Thanks to this program, I am learning to live my life clean and sober."

These are not just words of gratitude, but testaments to the shift from surviving to thriving. For many, recovery is a journey of rediscovery, where old patterns give way to a renewed sense of self and the confidence to build a future. That transformation is nurtured when culture, language and heritage are recognized as sources of strength, offering healing and a deeper sense of belonging in the world.

Casa's graduation is also a tribute to the collective effort recovery demands. Families reunite with relief and a renewed sense of hope. Children beam with pride as their parents accept certificates representing not just completion, but a commitment to a shared future. Friends, mentors and staff celebrate each success as if it was their own. Our housing, healthcare, employment and advocacy partners stand alongside us because they know recovery continues in the stability of a home, the dignity of work and the belonging found within a supportive community. Their presence affirms the truth that sustained recovery depends on both personal strength and systems of care that honor each person's humanity.

We celebrate in September because we honor both recovery and heritage in one breath. Many of our patients speak

*GRADUATION, see page 7*

## Supporting employment goals at Northeast Arc's Breaking Grounds Café



Charlie Toomey, an intern at Project Perk, serves a customer at Northeast Arc's Breaking Grounds café.

By Jo Ann Simons

Employment for people with disabilities is critical not just because of the paycheck it provides, but because it helps them feel like part of their communities. Unemployed people with disabilities face higher risks of poor physical and mental health, social isolation, low self-esteem and low life satisfaction. Despite the importance of employment, it's estimated that more than 80% of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are not included in the workforce.

So, when the city of Peabody approached Northeast Arc in 2017 about opening a coffee shop, we immediately recognized it as an opportunity to meet a community need, but more importantly to provide valuable job training skills to individuals with disabilities and autism. The result was Breaking Grounds Café.

The café is located on Main Street in Peabody, offering a full breakfast and lunch menu, as well as coffee drinks. Over the past eight years it has become an important community gathering space in bustling Peabody Square and has regularly been recognized as one of the best coffee shops on the North Shore. When a customer places their order, there's a good chance they'll be greeted by one of the interns in the Project Perk program.

Through Project Perk, interns at Breaking Grounds Café learn every aspect of working in food service: preparing drinks and food, cleaning, doing inventory and most importantly interacting with customers while taking orders and working the register. At the conclusion of each six-month internship, many participants secure jobs in either food service or retail.

Project Perk is part of Northeast Arc's larger job training program. In addition to the internship program at Breaking Grounds Café, the agency runs Project *Parcels*, where interns learn about retail at Northeast Arc's store at Liberty Tree Mall, and Project Pizza, a partnership with Amazing Pizza in Salem. These three programs have allowed Northeast Arc to expand its reach in the community, increasing the variety of businesses where participants can be hired. In total, 22 graduates from these programs are now employed across the North Shore, including at major chains like Starbucks, Panera, Market Basket, HomeGoods and J.P. Licks. We are proud of these partnerships with major brands, as it reinforces the fact

that individuals with disabilities have a place in the workforce.

An important component of all Northeast Arc's social enterprises is exposing our customers to people with disabilities, which we hope will break down stigma and normalize the presence of people with disabilities in the workforce. Our interns work alongside their neurotypical colleagues, further breaking down barriers.

These job training programs are newer but helping people with disabilities find employment has long been a key component of Northeast Arc's mission. For more than 60 years, the organization has been operating the Heritage Caning Company, training individuals on how to re-cane chairs and other items. For 40 years, we have been providing job development and coaching for people to become employed in private businesses. In total, Northeast Arc now supports 62 people who are employed at dozens of businesses across Eastern Massachusetts. There are many people who are also working who no longer require any supports in their jobs.

These training programs also benefit employers, who often struggle to attract and retain entry-level candidates. Studies have shown that employees with disabilities tend to have a higher retention rate than someone without a disability as they are less likely to change jobs due to uncertainty about how a new company would accommodate their needs. Cost is also not a barrier to employers. In a 2024 survey of 4,447 employers by the Job Accommodation Network, 56% reported no costs associated with providing accommodations, while 37% reported only a one-time cost averaging \$300.

An important part of Northeast Arc's success involves pairing individuals with job coaches who will help them navigate unique aspects of each job. Over time, coaches will provide less support, until individuals are working independently. This process ensures positive outcomes for both the employee and employer.

We believe that Breaking Grounds Café represents an innovative and impactful approach to job training for people with disabilities. By providing training in a supportive environment with Northeast Arc staff we are setting up Project Perk interns for success, not just at Breaking Grounds, but in their future roles.

*Jo Ann Simons is the president & CEO at Northeast Arc.*



STUDENTS: How college students are driving impact in our communities

Continued from Page 5

when seven Notre Dame students interned with our agency through the university's Institute for Social Concerns. Students conducted client intake, stocked food pantry bags and worked in our child-care centers, developing a profound understanding of how social services agencies operate in a way that is difficult to learn from the classroom alone.

As one student, Diego Alonso, shared, "I've had a mindset shift — what we're doing isn't just good charity, it's social justice."

Imagine the impact when student volunteers become business leaders who understand the value of corporate partnerships to nonprofits; educators who see the connections between trauma and learning challenges; or policymakers who craft legislation based on direct service experience. Volunteerism helps break down barriers

and creates empathy in these times of deep divisions.

For organizations like Catholic Charities, engaging with college students provide both immediate hope and long-term transformation. When we invest in these relationships, we're not just recruiting volunteers — we're cultivating ambassadors who will continue our work with fresh energy and innovative approaches.

Every time a student leaves our agency with a transformed understanding of the impact of volunteerism, we move one step closer to the future we're building together — one where compassion informs decisions, experience guides innovation and those who will go on to shape our world truly understand the complex needs of the communities they serve.

*Kelley Tuthill, Ed.D. is the president & CEO of Catholic Charities Boston.*



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Investing in Humanity

By Congressman Seth Moulton

Every day in Massachusetts, caregivers, caseworkers and social workers show up to make sure families have food on the table, seniors can live with dignity and children with disabilities get the care they need. Yet, the programs they rely on are under constant threat. If we want a more just and compassionate society, then we must fund the people and programs that make it work. That means defending the community services that protect our most vulnerable — caregivers, caseworkers, social workers and the essential programs that support them, from Medicaid and SNAP to mental health care and home-based services.

Even before the Trump administration, the safety net was strained. But under Trump's failed leadership, we are seeing aggressive attempts to dismantle it. From harsh Medicaid work requirements to massive cuts to SNAP, housing assistance and community health programs, their agenda deliberately targets the very people who rely on human services to survive.

In the wake of these attacks, the stakes couldn't be clearer: we must fight back. That starts by protecting the funding streams that keep community services running.

I've seen firsthand how critical these programs are. When my Uncle Andrew was born in 1964, the doctors recommended that my grandparents institutionalize him, a common recommendation at the time. But my grandparents brought him home, introduced him to his six brothers and sisters, one of whom was my mom. Andrew was my close friend, an integral part of my family and a beloved, contributing member of his community.

While parents today have more information about developmental disabilities than my grandparents did sixty years ago, far too many are still having to navigate raising a child with disabilities alone.

For the past nine years, I've championed the HEADs UP Act, which would have the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration officially recognize people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as "medically underserved." This designation would expand access to doctors and specialists, encourage new research and ensure providers are fairly reimbursed for the care they deliver.

My uncle was fortunate — his parents were able to care for him most of his life. But that's not the reality for many families. It's long past time to give them the support they need and deserve.

That support must also include making home and community-based care more accessible. Today, more than 650,000 Americans are on waiting lists

for home care, while caregivers — who are often women and people of color — remain underpaid and overworked. Congress must act to reduce wait times, invest in the caregiving workforce and make it possible for more people to receive care where they feel most comfortable.

Food insecurity is another crisis we cannot ignore. For one of the wealthiest countries in the world, it is indefensible that one-in-seven American households struggles to afford nutritious food to eat. Here in Massachusetts, 10.1% of residents experienced food insecurity between 2021 and 2023. Yet despite this, the most recent Republican funding bill includes a staggering \$186 billion in cuts to SNAP over the next decade.

SNAP works hand in hand with food banks, pantries and local nonprofits across our district to ensure that families can put food on the table. Gutting this support would deepen hunger and hardship for millions. And let's be clear — investing in food security doesn't just help families, it fuels our economy. Every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates over \$1.50 in local economic activity, supporting grocery stores, farmers markets and small businesses.

And finally, as someone who has spoken openly about my own experience with post-traumatic stress, I have spent my tenure in Congress fighting for accessible, stigma-free mental health care. That's why I helped introduce the 9-8-8 Implementation Act, which would expand Medicaid coverage for behavioral health services, fund community-based mobile crisis units and lift restrictions that prevent people from getting the care they need.

I will continue to fight against efforts to defund essential services, and whenever possible, I will keep working across the aisle to make sure our communities have the support they need to thrive. But no one person can fight this alone. It takes all of us. The human services sector doesn't just need advocacy in Washington, it needs advocacy in every town hall, city council and state budget hearing. Support the organizations in your community that provide critical services. Vote for policies, and policymakers, that protect and expand these essential programs.

We are at a perilous moment for our nation and for human services organizations. But we still can build a future where every American has access to healthcare. A future where caregivers are paid what they're worth. But that future won't create itself. We have to choose it and fight for it.

*Congressman Seth Moulton represents the 6<sup>th</sup> District of Massachusetts.*

Rep. Seth Moulton

*This 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.*

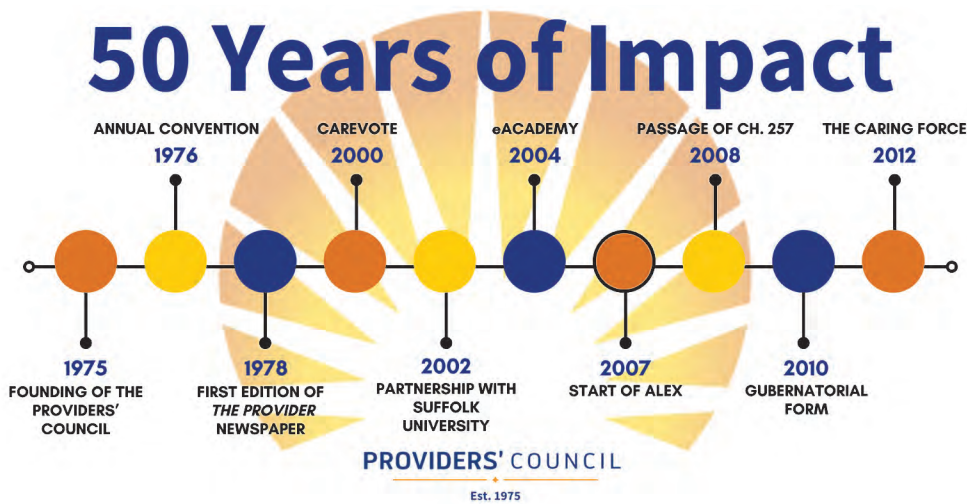
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PAGE 6 ■ THE PROVIDER ■ SEPTEMBER 2025



# ALEX: Council launched educational portal in 2007



In 2007, the Council launched the Institute for Learning and Exchange (ILEX) that would eventually become the Council's educational portal, ALEX.

Continued from Page 1

cational offerings in the 2007 Convention issue of *The Provider* newspaper. The Institute for Learning and Exchange, ILEX, was originally created to limit confusion as members navigated the Council's new website, creating a separate hub for information on trainings, graduate education programs, tuition remission and Provider's eAcademy®. It also would serve as a site for members to access all research, reports, human service roundtables and webinars. The goal of the site was to serve as not only a go-to source for education, but a space for members to exchange ideas.

The name was updated to ALEX in the spring of 2009 and grew to encompass scholarship opportunities, trainings and other programs geared toward membership connection and development, like The Leadership Initiative, which offers interagency mentorship opportunities for member em-

ployees, and social innovation and enterprise initiatives like the Social Innovator Directory.

Today, ALEX is the online home for all of the educational and exchange opportunities offered and facilitated by the Providers' Council. The initiative has expanded to include all the Council's educational offerings, including all trainings and webinars, the Council's eAcademy® program, the Council's academic programs, including tuition remission, its graduate level certificate program and scholarship opportunities, mentoring and social enterprise opportunities and the Council's Annual Convention & Expo.

As the Providers' Council enters its next 50 years, the Council will continue to provide a wide range of educational opportunities for its members through its ALEX platform. For more information on ALEX and any of the Council's educational opportunities, please contact [education@providers.org](mailto:education@providers.org).

## PARTNERSHIP: Council partners with Venteur and USI

Continued from Page 1

count, and their employees get to pick the plan that works best for their needs and lifestyle. An ICHRA is a significant shift from traditional health insurance plans, and it gives employees more choice and control over their plan.

"Human services workers do some of the most important, often overlooked work," said Stacy Edgar, CEO and co-founder of Venteur. "This partnership gives them something they've long needed: real choice and control over their health coverage. By offering flexible, affordable benefits built around the individual, we're helping care for those who care for others."

USI Insurance, a long-time partner of the Providers' Council, already provides Council members with exclusive member on a number of insurance products, including dental, vision, life, disability, accidental death and dismemberment and more. This new arrangement ensures Council members will also be able to have

access to an ICHRA offering.

The new partnership will offer plans through healthcare providers including Harvard Pilgrim, Mass General Brigham, Tufts, WellSense and Western Health Advantage. Members who take advantage of this plan will be able to hand off 1095, COBRA, PCORI filing, HIPAA compliance and SOC2, along with being able to track benefits spending and see how employees use their plans. The plan also includes access to personalized concierge support through Venteur's trusted in-house benefit experts.

"Employers in the human services sector need strong benefits to attract and keep great people," said Michael J. Sicard, Chairman, President and CEO of USI. "Together, the Providers' Council and Venteur are providing the means to ease the burden of benefits for employers, enabling them to offer benefits that truly fit their teams' needs."

For more information about this new partnership or to learn more about ICHRAs, please contact Ann Schuler at [aschuler@providers.org](mailto:aschuler@providers.org).

## MAHANIAH: Governor Healey announces new EOHHS Secretary

Continued from Page 1

nior Services (GLSS). "Dr. Mahaniah led his organization through the very challenging days of COVID — setting up mobile testing and vaccination clinics that served thousands... Post pandemic, Dr. Mahaniah ensured that important partnerships with other community agencies (including GLSS) were strengthened."

Mahaniah is also an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine. He holds an MBA from UMass Amherst, a medical degree from Thomas Jefferson University and a BA from Haverford College.

"I'm grateful to Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll for the op-

portunity to continue serving the people of Massachusetts as Secretary, and to Secretary Walsh for her leadership over the past few years," said Mahaniah, according to State House News Service. "This is certainly a challenging moment for health care and human services work, but our state has a head start — thanks to our world-leading resources, talent, providers and partners — to come together, solve problems, and work to make the right services and supports available to people who need them."

Secretary Mahaniah plans to address attendees at the Council's 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention & Expo: *50 Years Together: Celebrating Today, Shaping Tomorrow* on Monday, October 6 at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel in Boston.

# WORKSHOPS: Council announces new workshop offering at its 50<sup>th</sup> landmark convention

Continued from Page 1

tor of Education and Membership at the Council. "To celebrate 50 years, we felt this expanded lineup would offer more opportunities for our members to learn something new and time to recharge and connect with peers."

Expanding on previous years' offerings, the Council will host 39 workshops across three workshop sessions — adding an additional session block from prior years. This new schedule provides attendees more opportunities to explore different topics connected to the human services sector. Each session will have 13 hour-long experiences, including traditional workshops, chat panels, networking rounds and wellness sessions.

"We wanted to expand our offerings to align with this year's theme of celebrating how far we've come while also building connections for the future of the sector," said Nina Lamarre, Education and Training coordinator at the Council. "We also have so many fantastic traditional workshops that are geared toward everyone from direct care staff to executives, so there are countless opportunities to learn and grow throughout the day."

This year, the workshop tracks will focus on topics related to direct care practices and clinical tools, equity, justice and culturally responsive practices, financial stability, innovation and technology, leadership and organizational development and workforce development, along with the new networking rounds and wellness sessions.

The Council is also excited to have keynote speaker, Cait Donovan, hosting two sessions on burnout for supervisors and direct care staff. Donovan is a burnout expert and host of "Fried: The Burnout Podcast" and author of *The Bounce-*

*backability Factor*. With a background in biobehavioral science and Chinese medicine, Donovan bridges Eastern and Western perspectives to offer practical, proven strategies for emotional well-being, resilience and burnout recovery.

"I'm fired up for these breakout sessions because I know how much time and energy burnout can steal," said Donovan. "Attendees will get practical strategies they can start using immediately — and the chance to ask their own questions so they walk away with advice that's not just generic, but laser-focused on their real-life situations. The most important bit for me about the breakouts is the chance for participants to ask their own questions and dive deeper into getting their needs met."

In addition to those tracks, the Council is bringing back its "Chat with Secretaries and Commissioners" panel series, that will have representatives from across EOHHS and state government, including the Massachusetts departments of Children and Families, Developmental Services, Early Education and Care, Mental Health, Transitional Assistance, Youth Services; the Executive Office of Aging and Independence; Massachusetts commissions for the Blind and Deaf and Hard of Hearing; MassAbility; the Office of the Child Advocate; and Executive Office of Veterans' Services.

General registration for the Council's Annual Convention is now sold out, but people can join the waitlist by emailing [convention@providers.org](mailto:convention@providers.org). Registration includes access to the keynote presentation, workshops, expo, continental breakfast, lunch, reception, program book and additional convention materials.

For additional information regarding the convention, visit our website at [www.providers.org](http://www.providers.org).

## GRADUATION: Where recovery meets heritage

Continued from Page 5

about healing as a return to traditions, family and a sense of self they thought was lost. Holding those two truths together — recovery and culture — makes the celebration richer. It also reminds us that culturally relevant and responsive care is not a luxury — it is essential. It is the difference between just getting by and living a whole life filled with pride, purpose and love.

As the day approaches, I have been thinking of the urgency to protect and strengthen the supports that make these moments possible. Access to behavioral health care and recovery support is still uneven. Too many people face the steepest climb just to reach the starting line. Graduation shows what can happen when those barriers are removed, when people have space, resources and a community of support to help them heal. It is a joyous occasion, but also a quiet truth: without a place like Casa, many of these stories

would have ended before they began.

When I watch our graduates cross the stage each year, I don't see that individual alone — I see the people they carry and that carried them, the pride they now hold in themselves and their community and the possibilities that stretch out ahead of them. Graduation is never the final page in a story. It is the first page of the next chapter, written with courage and hope. On September 19, when the celebration of recovery and heritage meet on Eustis Street, we will be reminded once again that each next step is filled with endless possibility; that the compassion and care that connect us, rooted in culture and solidarity, continue to strengthen us — and that though the journey to recovery is long and uncertain, if we stick together, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

*Emily Stewart is the CEO of Casa Esperanza.*

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