Rep. Sabadosa: Flexible funding is the key to ending homelessness

VIEW FROM THE HILL
PAGE 10



Transition House provides comprehensive, survivor-centered care

PROVIDER PROFILE
PAGE 3



Unshaken in Purpose — for 51 years and counting

EDITORIAL
PAGE 8



THE PROVIDER

Volume 47 — No. 10 | The Newspaper of the Providers' Council | November 2026

Legislative year in review: Measuring impact and setting the stage for next session

During the 2025-26 legislative session, advocacy remained a top priority for the Council as it continued to champion the needs of the human services sector. Through several advocacy initiatives, the Council was able to advance key legislation, build strong partnerships and mobilize advocates statewide.

This year, the Council once again secured full funding for Chapter 257. The final state budget included $175 million in the Chapter 257 line item. With additional money needed to ensure full funding, the administration requested that $90 million remaining in the FY '26 reserve be carried into FY '27 through the closeout supplemental budget, which was signed by the MA House of Representatives on Oct. 21. As of writing, the MA Senate is expected to take up the bill after the November elections.

Additionally, during the 2025-2026 legislative session, both the Council's legislative priorities, *An act relative to a livable wage for human services workers* (S.130 | H.223) and *An act relative to a loan repayment program for human services workers* (S.119 | H.283), were reported favorably by the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities. While the Council and its grassroots advocacy movement, The Caring Force, continued to champion these bills, they did not advance out of the House or Senate Ways and Means committees.

Looking ahead to FY '28, the Council will again be championing its core legislative priorities: securing a livable wage for human services workers and creating a student loan repayment fund for the sector. This year, the Council published its latest research report, *Stretched to Capacity*, which examined the current state of the human services workforce in the Commonwealth, including current employment demographics, vacancy rates and structural factors driving the workforce crisis and the consequences for individuals, families and communities. The report found that client-facing positions had a 15 percent full-time vacancy rate and a 16 percent part-time vacancy rate as workers leave for higher-paying state agency roles.

In addition, the Council's student loan repayment initiative focuses on easing the financial burden of student loan debt by

2027-28 PRIORITIES, see page 11

Unshaken in Purpose delivers a resounding success

The energy at the Boston Marriott Copley Place was palpable on Oct. 26 as nearly 1,200 dedicated professionals gathered for the Providers' Council's 51st Annual Convention & Expo. Anchored by this year's theme, *Unshaken in Purpose*, the sold-out gathering showcased the unwavering commitment of the leaders and staff shaping human services across Massachusetts.

Cam F. Awesome, former captain of Team USA, author of *Becoming Awesome: Defeating Average Through Gratitude and Resilience* and a featured athlete in the Netflix documentary *CounterPunch*, delivered the convention's keynote address.

"If you can fail without being discouraged, success becomes inevitable. A lot of people see this quote, they see the word failure, they think failing is bad. Failure is good, it's how you get better; failure is an opportunity to gain experience," said Awesome during his keynote address. "The bad word is discouraged. Because we don't quit when we fail, we quit when we get discouraged."

Drawing on his unwavering positivity, Awesome shared the story of how he built his career on turning setbacks into success. The Council also welcomed Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Secretary Kiame Mahaniah, who shared some empowering remarks, rounding out an impressive lineup of speakers.



The Council celebrated its 51st Annual Convention, Unshaken in Purpose*, on Oct. 26.*

Building on the record-breaking workshop lineup from last year's anniversary convention, the Council again offered 39 workshops, panels and networking sessions. More than 70 exhibitors from a va-

CONVENTION, see page 5

Council partners with MA DDS to deliver essential Positive Behavior Support training via eAcademy®

Providers' eAcademy®, the Council's online learning management system, powered by Relias, has opened the door to more learning opportunities through adding several new courses in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS). These new courses provide member organizations subscribed to eAcademy® with further resources to strengthen their programs through direct guidance from DDS.

"We're excited to collaborate with DDS to offer the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) training in Providers' eAcademy®," said Dave Cerrone, eAcademy® LMS Manager. "According to DDS, the modules were designed to provide professionals with effective strategies for fostering positive behaviors. They provide members with valuable insights into

eACADEMY®, see page 11

Cam F. Awesome urges human services leaders to rewrite their stories

Cam F. Awesome lives by one mantra: if you can fail without being discouraged, success becomes inevitable. A national champion heavyweight boxer, former captain of Team USA, bestselling author of *Becoming Awesome: Defeating Average Through Gratitude and Resilience*, and featured athlete in the Netflix documentary *CounterPunch*, Awesome has built his career on turning setbacks into success through the power of determination and self-compassion.

When Cam F. Awesome took the stage at the Council's 51st Annual Convention & Expo: *Unshaken in Purpose*, he asked the audience to consider how their personal stories impact their behavior.

"We all tell ourselves stories about who we are, what we deserve, and what we're capable of. And the thing you repeat about yourself is who you become. I hear people saying, I could never do that thing, I'll never get that promotion, I'm bad with money, I'm not smart enough to pull that off, or I don't figure things out and then they become that person," said Awesome. "I want people



Cam F. Awesome delivered an inspirational keynote address to a crowd of 1,200 at the 51st Annual Convention & Expo.

to question the stories they've been telling about themselves and realize that they have the autonomy and the power to change

AWESOME, see page 7

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Providers News and Notes

Jim Goodwin, president/CEO of the Center for Human Development (CHD), announces plans to step down



Jim Goodwin

The Center for Human Development (CHD) announced that its board of directors has begun planning for the eventual succession of longtime President and CEO Jim Goodwin, who has shared his intention to retire following a thoughtful leadership transition.

Goodwin, whose career in human services spans five decades, including more than 20 years as CHD's president and CEO, will continue to lead the organization fully throughout the search and transition process. No date has been established for his retirement.

The board of directors has retained Lindauer, a global executive search and talent advisory firm, to lead a national search for CHD's next president and CEO. The board will oversee the search process, with Goodwin continuing to serve as president and CEO throughout the transition.

Riverside Community Care & Bay State Community Services to merge

The boards of **Riverside Community Care** and Bay State Community Services (BSCS) have approved a merger, effective Jan. 1, 2027. The combined organization will operate under the Riverside Community Care name.

By joining together, Riverside and BSCS will bring complementary programs and adjacent service areas into one organization, strengthening their ability to provide coordinated care across eastern, central and southeastern Massachusetts. Together, the new organization will have more than 2,000 employees and an annual budget of approximately $175 million, creating a larger, more financially and operationally resilient organization.

The Nemasket Group strengthens leadership team with two key promotions

The Nemasket Group announced the promotions of Kim Lawrence to director of finance and Ericka Duckett to chief program officer. Both Lawrence and Duckett bring extensive organizational knowledge and a strong commitment to The Nemasket Group's mission of empowering individuals and families of all abilities to live self-directed lives.

As director of finance, Lawrence brings 12 years of experience with The Nemasket Group, most recently serving as assistant director of finance. In her new role, she will provide leadership to the organization's financial operations and help strengthen the financial systems and infrastructure necessary to support The Nemasket Group's continued growth and long-term sustainability.

Duckett, who has been with The Nemasket Group for 22 years, will step into the newly created chief program officer position in January. Throughout her tenure, she has served the organization in roles of progressively increasing responsibility and currently serves as director of day services. As chief program officer, Duckett will work in close partnership with CEO Jenny Duval and provide leadership and oversight across the organization's program services.

Thrive Support & Advocacy appoints Merari Alvarado as vice president of community support services



Merari Alvarado

Thrive Support & Advocacy announced the appointment of Merari Alvarado as vice president of community support services.

Alvarado will provide leadership and oversight for Thrive's community-based programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), ranging from family supports, life skills development and employment, recreational and wellness opportunities. Her focus will be on enabling the delivery of high-quality, person-centered services that foster community inclusion. She will also manage the Flourish at Thrive food pantry, which supplies restrictive diet and allergen-friendly food options to the greater Worcester area, including individuals served by the organization.

Most recently, Alvarado served as associate vice president of community support services and has held numerous family support and community services roles since joining the agency in 2020. She spearheaded the expansion of Thrive's community-based day services and has over two decades of experience supporting families and individuals with diverse backgrounds.

Jack Rua Invitational raises funds for diabetes camp



People Incorporated *recently held its annual Jack Rua Invitational at Crestwood Country Club in Rehoboth, MA. The golf tournament raises funds to support the Jack Rua Camp for Children with Diabetes, a program of the Diabetes Association, Inc., which is an affiliate organization of People Incorporated. Dozens of sponsors, donors and participants combined their support to raise a record $75,000 in funds that will go to operate "Camp Jack."*

Mainstay Supportive Housing & Home Care announces new board chair



Ian Macnab

Mainstay Supportive Housing & Home Care announced that Ian Macnab has been elected chairman of Mainstay's board of directors effective Jan. 1, 2027. Macnab has been a board member for the last four years.

Macnab is the founder and managing partner of Kateri Capital, a Boston-based asset manager focused on real estate and growth equity investments. He has spent much of his career investing in and working with multifamily real estate, and specifically affordable housing. Macnab joined Mainstay's board in 2022 and previously served as chair of its finance committee. Macnab is taking over for Bob Manasse, who held the position for the past seven years.

Bridge Over Troubled Waters elects Frantz Bien-Aime to its board



Frantz Bien-Aime

Bridge Over Troubled Waters (Bridge) has announced the appointment of Frantz Bien-Aime to its board of directors.

Bien-Aime is managing director and market executive for Upper New England at Bank of America. He joined the bank in 1997 and has served in a variety of sales, operational and risk management roles. Bien-Aime participates in several employee networks including the Black Executive Leadership Council and the Black Professional Group, where he is executive sponsor for the Boston chapter. Outside of work, he also serves on the board of the Cambridge Community Foundation, which seeks to advance economic mobility and build social cohesion in the City of Cambridge.



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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL!

Membership renewal time is right around the corner, and the Counccil wants to help members make the most of their benefits!

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Provider Profiles

Transition House

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About the Agency

Fifty years ago, a group of Cambridge community members came together around a radical idea: people experiencing abuse in their homes deserved a safe place to go. In 1976, they founded Transition House as a grassroots feminist collective, establishing the first domestic violence shelter on the East Coast and the second in the nation.

What began as a small, community-led effort has grown into a comprehensive organization providing emergency shelter, housing, counseling and advocacy. For five decades, Transition House has helped shape the movement to end domestic violence while continually evolving to meet the changing needs of survivors.

In 1996, Transition House moved from its collective structure to a formal nonprofit organization. In the early 2000s, it expanded beyond emergency shelter to establish transitional and permanent supportive housing programs. The launch of its Community Support Partnership in 2013 further extended services to survivors who live or work in Cambridge.

Today, Transition House continues to build on its founding vision, providing survivor-centered services that address immediate safety while supporting long-term healing, housing stability and independence.

Supported by public funding, philanthropy and corporate partnerships, Transition House remains deeply rooted in the community where it began. On Oct. 8, the organization celebrated its 50th anniversary with its inaugural Red Door Benefit, bringing together 175 supporters and raising $300,000 to advance its mission.

Transition House celebrates 50 years of working to end domestic violence

For survivors of domestic violence, finding safety is just the beginning. Rebuilding a life can mean finding stable housing, navigating the legal system, accessing counseling and creating a sense of security for children and families. Transition House has spent 50 years developing programs that respond to these interconnected needs, recognizing that every survivor's path forward is different.

The organization's services begin with a confidential, 24-hour hotline offering crisis intervention, safety planning and referrals. Its emergency shelter provides a safe place for up to nine families at a time, with round-the-clock staffing and individualized support.

For many survivors, finding safe, affordable housing is one of the greatest barriers to rebuilding their lives. Through transitional and permanent supportive housing programs developed in partnership with the Cambridge Housing Authority, Transition House helps survivors establish long-term housing stability while receiving support tailored to their needs.

For people experiencing abuse who live or work in Cambridge, the Community Support Partnership offers a wide range of services, including safety planning, housing assistance, legal advocacy, court accompaniment, help accessing public benefits and support groups. These community-based services reach individuals and families of all ages, including older adults.

Transition House provides healing-centered counseling for adults, children and adolescents affected by domestic violence. The organization recognizes that children are not simply witnesses to violence in their homes, but victims in their own right, whose experiences deserve specialized attention and care.

Throughout its programs, Transition House serves people across gender identities, races, ethnicities and backgrounds, offering interpretation and translation services and employing multilingual staff to help survivors access support in their preferred languages.



Lindsay Bradley, resident support coordinator, builds a toy motorcycle for the Holiday Wishes annual gift campaign.

Underlying this broad range of services is a guiding principle that has shaped Transition House since its founding: survivors are the experts in their own lives. Whether someone is seeking immediate safety or working toward long-term stability, the organization's role is to provide the resources, relationships and opportunities that allow each person to determine their own future.

Executive Leadership



Sarah Gyorog

Sarah Gyorog has served as executive director of Transition House since 2018, but her commitment to ending domestic violence began much earlier. At age 20, while still living in her college dorm room, she worked her first overnight shift in a domestic violence shelter. That experience helped shape a lifelong commitment to survivors and social justice.

A survivor herself, Gyorog believes domestic violence is not simply an individual tragedy, but a social justice issue rooted in broader systems of power and oppression. She leads with the conviction that ending violence requires more than providing services; it requires transforming the conditions that allow violence to persist.

At Transition House, approximately 70 percent of staff identify as survivors of domestic violence. Gyorog recognizes their lived experience as a powerful source of expertise, vision and leadership. She aims to foster a collaborative culture where new ideas are welcomed, staff are empowered to lead and the people closest to the challenges help shape the solutions.

Fifty years after survivors founded Transition House, Gyorog is carrying forward their vision, investing in people, strengthening community partnerships and building collective power.

Together, they are pursuing a radical vision: building a world free from domestic violence that none of us has yet experienced.

Saluting The Caring Force

Devon O'Connor: Championing employment, empowerment, and success

Devon O'Connor has been a valued member of **Opportunity Works** since 2009, when she was hired as a job developer. From the beginning, O'Connor brought an impressive background, a strong skill set, and a commitment to helping individuals achieve meaningful employment. O'Connor holds an associate degree from North Shore Community College and carries an impressive 15+ years working in the field of employment for individuals with disabilities.

O'Connor consistently demonstrates a high level of performance and, most importantly, truly loves what she does. Her dedication to the Employment First initiative is evident in the work she does every day and, in her willingness to share her knowledge with others.

O'Connor has taken the initiative to educate her peers on the Employment First initiative and has facilitated extensive trainings for our community-based day supports staff, which have been extremely helpful in strengthening our team's understanding of the importance of employment and the opportunities available to the people Opportunity Works supports.

"When I became a job developer, I discovered a particular passion for witnessing the transformative impact that meaningful employment can have on a person's life. Seeing individuals find jobs they love in supportive, inclusive environments has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career," O'Connor said. "I am deeply grateful to witness the profound changes that employment can bring, and I take great pride in walking alongside individuals as they build confidence, discover new opportunities, and step into their futures."

Her vast knowledge and expertise have also been recognized in the broader community.



O'Connor showcases the value of employment inclusion into her community.

O'Connor was asked by Make-It Haverhill to assist with employment presentations for their students, where she received glowing feedback for a job well done. This is another example of how she takes the organization's mission beyond the walls of Opportunity Works and helps others understand the value of employment and inclusion.

O'Connor is an integral part of the Opportunity Works team. Her dedication, knowledge and willingness to support both her colleagues and the individuals the agency serves make her a tremendous asset to Opportunity Works. The agency is fortunate to have someone so committed to her work and to the mission of enhancing the quality of life of people with disabilities by empowering individuals and promoting a culture of dignity and respect through integration, inclusion and independence it strives to fulfill every day.

Souhail Oucible: Dedication and compassion in action

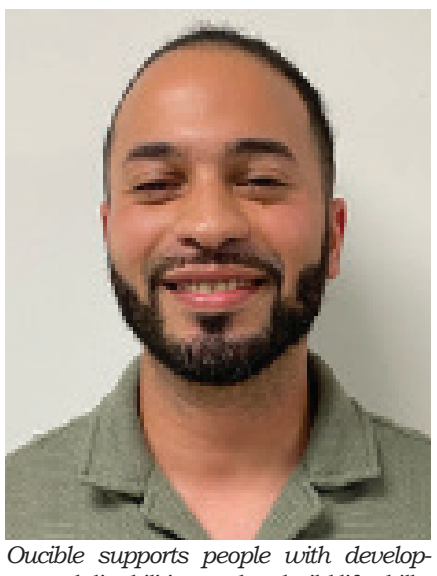
At the **NEEDS Center**, making a difference often comes down to the small, consistent acts of care that help people feel supported, confident, and connected. Since joining the organization in February 2025, direct support professional Souhail Oucible has made those moments a hallmark of his work.

At the NEEDS Center's Beverly Day Program, Oucible supports people with developmental disabilities as they build everyday life skills, develop greater independence and take part in meaningful activities.

His days are busy, but rewarding: he assists with personal care, communication and social interactions; helps implement individualized support plans; and encourages participation in educational, recreational and community-based experiences. He also provides positive behavioral support, documents individual progress and collaborates closely with colleagues to help each person work toward their goals.

Oucible contributes in ways that extend beyond his regular responsibilities. His skillful coordination of transportation at the end of each day helps ensure a smooth transition for the individuals supported and the team. Certified in Safety Care, MAP, CPR and First Aid, he brings both valuable training and a dependable presence to his role.

"Since he started with us, Souhail has been a quiet, reliable and valued member of our team. He consistently steps up to take on new responsibilities, never



Oucible supports people with developmental disabilities as they build life skills.

shies away from a challenge, and is always willing to help wherever needed," said Kylie Lorenzo, a program coordinator at the Beverley Day Program.

A trilingual team member, Oucible also brings an important ability to connect across languages. As a senior staff member, he leads by example through his strong work ethic, positive attitude and willingness to lend a hand.

For Oucible, the motivation is simple: "I love to help people in any way I can. I am inspired by the good, caring work that I see other people do as well."

Perhaps the most memorable endorsement comes from one of the adults he supports, who sums it up perfectly: "He is very cool."

Council presents $50,000 in scholarships at annual convention and expo

Building on the momentum of its 50th anniversary celebration last year, the Providers' Council presented $50,000 in educational scholarships at its annual convention, *Unshaken in Purpose*. Nine member employees pursuing advanced degrees received awards to support their higher education journey.

Eduardo Pagán, a youth support specialist at Open Sky Community Services, was awarded the Graduate Leadership scholarship of $10,000 for an employee entering or currently enrolled in a master's degree program in Massachusetts. Pagán is pursuing a Master of Social Work degree at Boston University.

In partnership with Suffolk University, the Council presented two $5,000 scholarships to Jennifer Gunnarson of South Shore Support Services and Lily White from Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD). Gunnarson serves as director of human resources at South Shore Support Services. White currently works as an early childhood information and referral specialist at ABCD. These Matava and Weekes Scholarships, previously known as Master of Public Administration (MPA) Scholarships, are awarded only to graduates of the Council's Certificate in Nonprofit Human Services Management Program with Suffolk University who are going on to pursue their MPA at the university.

Tuoyo Emmanuel Erewa, a housing case manager at Bay Cove Human Services and a Nigerian immigrant, was awarded the Council's $5,000 Foreign-Born Leader Scholarship. Erewa is pursuing a Master of Business Administration degree at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

The Council also awarded five additional $5,000 collegiate scholarships to member employees. The winners of the five scholarships included Daniela Baez, a behavioral health case manager at Pine Street Inn; Sean Cosslett, a direct service worker at Advocates; Nadia Goncalves, a domestic violence coordinator and advocate at Family and Community Resources, Inc.; Jannine Reyes, the Parents as Teachers program supervisor at Square One; and Rachel Walker-Zamora, a substance use disorder counselor at Victory Programs.

All five collegiate scholarship recipients are pursuing master's level degrees. Baez and Cosslett are both attending Boston University; Baez is pursuing a Master of Social Work degree and Cosslett is currently working toward a Master of Education degree. Goncalves is studying for her master's in criminal justice at Bridgewater State University. Reyes is pursuing a Master of Social Work degree at Elms College and Walker-Zamora is currently working toward her Master of Clinical Mental Health Counseling degree at Lesley University.

The Council's Scholarship Committee, chaired by Roxbury Youthworks Executive Director Mia Alvarado, includes AIDS Project Worcester CEO Michelle Smith; Central Boston Elder Services CEO Sylvia Exantus; Communities for People President & CEO Craig Gordon; Kennedy-Donovan Center President & CEO Lisa Morgan; Pathways for Change President & CEO Kim Dawkins; Director of Suffolk University's Moakley Center for Public Management Brendan Burke; Council President & CEO Bill Yelenak; and Council Director of Education and Membership Ann Schuler.



Back row, from left: Bill Yelenak, president & CEO of the Providers' Council; Mia Alvarado, chair of the Scholarship Committee and executive director of Roxbury Youthworks; and Nina Lamarre, education and training coordinator of the Providers' Council.

Front row, from left: Tuoyo Emmanuel Erewa, Bay Cove Human Services; Rachel Walker-Zamora, Victory Programs; Daniela Baez, Pine Street Inn; Eduardo Pagán, Open Sky Community Services; Lily White, Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD); Jennifer Gunnarson, South Shore Support Services; and Sean Cosslett, Advocates.



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CONVENTION: Nearly 1,200 celebrate the Council's 51st Annual Convention & Expo

riety of service areas lined the expo hall at this year's event, sharing their expertise with attendees.

"It's fantastic that the Providers' Council provides an outreach for all the different vendors and their community to tap into one another's markets," said Mark Steiner, executive sales consultant for USI Insurance Services.

To honor dedication across the Commonwealth, the Council recognized 13 awardees: 11 Awards of Excellence recipients and two Peer Provider honorees. Continuing the momentum set at last year's convention, the Council was again able to award $50,000 in academic scholarships, presented to nine future leaders of the community-based human services sector to help them pursue further education.

The Caring Force (TCF) also announced Christina Darling from NFI Massachusetts as the winner of this year's T-shirt Design Contest. Second place went to Sonja Haecker from Berkshire County Arc and third place went to Brian Camara-Pereira from LifeStream, Inc. The newly designed t-shirt is available for purchase on the TCF storefront found on thecaringforce.org.

The day ended with the Chair's Reception, where Board Chair Chris White, president & CEO of Road to Responsibility, presented the 2026 Chair's Award to Kathleen Jordan, president & CEO of Seven Hills Foundation.

The Council thanks its sponsors and exhibitors, including Diamond sponsor USI and Platinum sponsor Advocates, for helping make the convention a success.



Nearly 1,200 human services professionals gather at the Marriott Copley Place in Boston for the Providers' Council's 51st Annual Convention & Expo on Oct. 26.

The Council extends its gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of this event. The Council is already looking ahead to its 52nd Annual Convention & Expo next year and remains steadfast in its mission to advance the interests of the human services sector, strengthening its collective impact through advocacy, education and connection.

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- The Edinburg Center
- Waystone Health and Human Services

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- Victory Programs

Unshaken In Purpose

2026 Awards of Excellence Recipients & Peer Provider Awardees



Christina Furtado



Emmanuel Nwaoha



C. Mike Wilson



Sean Rose



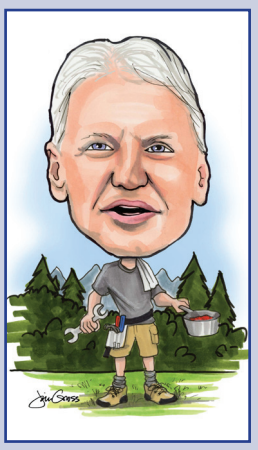
Amy Arrell



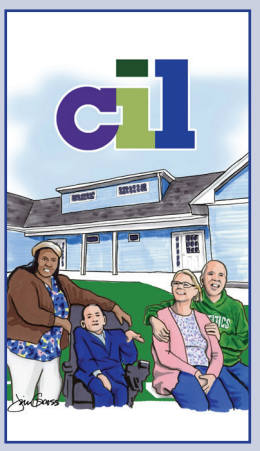
Shawneen Barrett-Isom



Latawnda Brown



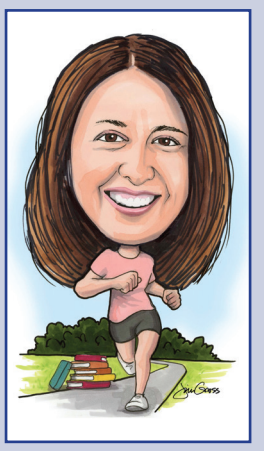
Doug Lanich



Corporation for Independent Living (CIL)



Representative Lindsay Sabadosa



Senator Robyn Kennedy

PEER PROVIDER AWARDS



REACH Beyond Domestic Violence



St. Mary's Center for Women and Children

Each year during its annual convention, the Providers' Council presents Awards of Excellence and Peer Provider Awards to deserving individuals and organizations for outstanding contributions and accomplishments within the private provider industry. These individuals and organizations exemplify the standards of excellence for the human services sector.

• Gerry Wright Direct Service Employee of the Year Award

Awarded to direct service employees in recognition of outstanding dedication and performance.

Christina Furtado
Waystone Health and Human Services
Nominated by Waystone Health and Human Services

Emmanuel Nwaoha
Vinfen
Nominated by Vinfen

C. Mike Wilson
Justice Resource Institute (JRI)
Nominated by Pathways for Children, Inc.

• CEO and Supervisor Awards

Awarded to organization leaders for commitment to serving those in need.

Sean Rose, Chief Executive Officer of the Year Award
Thrive Support & Advocacy
Nominated by Thrive Support & Advocacy

Amy Arrell, Supervisor/Manager of the Year Award
Open Sky Community Services
Nominated by Open Sky Community Services

Shawneen Barrett-Isom, Supervisor/Manager of the Year Award
LifeStream, Inc.
Nominated by LifeStream, Inc.

• Ruth M. Batson Advocate of the Year Award

Awarded to an advocate for outstanding leadership and inspiration.

Latawnda Brown
Project HOPE Boston
Nominated by Project HOPE Boston

• Volunteer of the Year

Awarded to individuals for exemplary volunteerism in the sector.

Doug Lanich
Novus
Nominated by Novus

• Business Partner of the Year

Awarded to a vendor or individual that made significant contributions to an agency.

Corporation for Independent Living (CIL)
Nominated by Incompass Human Services

• Legislator of the Year Awards

Awarded to a legislative champion from each chamber.

Representative Lindsay Sabadosa
Nominated by Viability

Senator Robyn Kennedy
Nominated by Open Sky Community Services

• Peer Provider Awards

Awarded to an organization for its commitment to serving those in need.

REACH Beyond Domestic Violence
Nominated by Pathways for Change, Inc.

St. Mary's Center for Women and Children
Nominated by Old Colony YMCA

The Joan Newton Memorial Scholarship Fund



To honor the memory of Joan Newton, who masterminded the rejuvenation and expansion of the Providers' Council Annual Convention & Expo, the Council established a scholarship in her name. Joan passed away in November 2003 after a five-year battle with cancer. This fund provides financial assistance to individuals who would otherwise not be able to attend the annual convention.

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AWESOME: Keynote address delivers message of positivity and perseverance

Continued from page 1

their identity. It's not easy, but it can be fun."

Awesome shared his unique brand of energy and inspiration with the sold-out crowd of 1,200 attendees at the Boston Marriott Copley Place Hotel.

Awesome's journey has been all about stories. Struggling with bullying in his youth led Awesome to construct a narrative of weakness and cowardice. In high school, he joined a local free gym and began a new story: Cam the boxer.

"I was tired of being afraid and in 11th grade, I had an idea to join a boxing gym. I thought if I joined the gym and became a big buff boxer, I could defend myself against bullies," said Awesome. "At the start of my senior year, my parents picked up and moved from New York to Florida. This would be devastating for a high school senior under normal circumstances, but for me I saw it as a fresh start. I get to be anything I want. Some of you are old enough to get this reference; do you remember the show Family Matters? The main character Steve Urkel would drink a potion and transform into Stefan Urquelle. I was about to get my Stefan on!"

Awesome recalled that part of shaping his new identity was transforming his fear into motivation. With the guidance and support of exceptional coaches, and the power of mixtapes, Awesome gained the confidence to write the next chapter in his story.

"Out of boredom, I started making up stories in my head. This time, I decided that if I was going to be the author of the story in my head, why wouldn't I make myself the hero?" said Awesome. "I saw a direct correlation between how highly I spoke about myself for three hours on my way to the gym and how well I performed once I got there. Fifteen hours a week I was patting myself on the back, telling myself I'm unstoppable, I'm capable of anything, I'm a champion, it created a feedback loop of confidence; I started beating boxers I had no business beating."

The stories Awesome told himself began to shape his reality. After high school, he got the opportunity to pursue boxing full time. Through his experiences in the ring, Awesome learned that the hold that failure has on a person has more to do with discouragement than the actual failure.

"You miss a hundred percent of the shots you don't take. We talk a lot about taking the shot, but how do you talk to yourself after you miss the shot? What's the story you tell yourself?" said Awesome. "So often in life when we fall short that's when we want to quit. But we have experience on our side; we're literally in the best position to succeed."

Awesome became captain of Team USA after winning the national title in 2008. He went on to win the Golden Gloves in 2009 and 2011 and a second national title in 2010.

At what seemed like the height of his career in 2012, Awesome was suspended from Team USA. He told the crowd how he had forgotten to inform the United States Anti-Doping Agency of a trip out of the country, causing him to miss a random drug test at his home. Losing his spot on the 2012 U.S. Olympic team, Awesome found himself at a crossroads in his story, and for a time, he stopped writing it altogether.

"I stopped leaving my house. . . I went from this obnoxious person who believed in myself. . . and won all the time, and I turned into someone who was constantly beating themselves up," said Awesome. "I lost my spark; I lost my magic. One day I looked in the mirror, I'm like 'you idiot. . . how did we get here?' And in that moment, I realized there was a difference between me in 2012 and the me that walked to the gym in high school; one of us liked me."

This dissonance between his identities is what led Awesome to discover himself. He realized that he could radically rewrite his story and create a new character for himself to embody: Cam F. Awesome.

"How do we break the story? A lot of us think that if I change my behavior enough, it will change my identity. But hear me out, I have a completely different way to go about this. What if you just started with a new identity?" Awesome asked. "So, I decided, what would it look like to recreate my identity, and I decided to do what any respectable adult would do in this situation. I went to city hall, spent $178 and I legally changed my last name to Awesome."

On his half birthday, Awesome hosted a celebration and unveiled his new name and persona to the people in his life. While some thought he was crazy, he felt more confident in himself than ever before.

Awesome went on to win the national title two more times in 2013 and 2014 and again won the Golden Gloves in 2013. His time as a fighter taught him how courage and confidence can unlock extraordinary potential.

"I hope people walked away recognizing that they have more control over the way they see themselves than they realize. The stories we tell ourselves shape who we believe we are and what we believe we're capable of," Awesome said after the event. "My final challenge is simple: Be intentional about the story you're telling yourself. Give yourself permission to recognize how awesome you already are while continuing to grow into who you want to become. And remember, you don't have to wait until you've accomplished something extraordinary to start believing you're capable of extraordinary things. Be delusional!"

Awesome has told himself many stories in his life. On the stage, he challenged the crowd to consider the stories they had been telling themselves, and what it would look like if they changed the narrative.



Former Team USA Boxing captain Cam F. Awesome addresses the audience at the 51st Annual Convention & Expo in Boston.

"Life's going to knock you down, and when it does, before you get back up, smile. Your attitude dictates your next move," said Awesome as he concluded the keynote. "So, on this journey of life, be kind to yourself, tell yourself a better story and above all, stay awesome."

The Council was honored to welcome Awesome as the keynote speaker for its 51st Annual Convention & Expo. His story of resilience, transformation and embracing change offers a powerful perspective on what it means to remain *Unshaken in Purpose*.

Moments from the Council's 51st Annual Convention & Expo: *Unshaken in Purpose*



Felicia Heywood, DEIB consultant, presents "Tiny Cuts, Deep Wounds: A Look at Microaggressions."



Navigating Life exhibitors, Jackie Champoux and Madeleine Green, speak to an attendee.



From left to right: Brian Camara-Pereira, LifeStream, Inc.; Lisa Hopsicker (in place of Sonja Haecker), Berkshire County Arc; and Christina Darling, NFI Massachusetts, the third, second and first place winners of The Caring Force's T-shirt Contest.



Makendi Henry Alcé (left) and Ishtar Pady from William James College stand together at the Council's 51st Annual Convention.



Back row, left to right: Alexis Steel, St. Mary's Center for Women & Children; Sean Rose, Thrive Support & Advocacy; Bill Yelenak, Providers' Council; Chris Canna, CIL; and Amarely Gutiérrez Oliver, REACH Beyond Domestic Violence.

Front row, left to right: Emmanuel Nwaoha, Vinfen; Shawneen Barrett-Isom, LifeStream, Inc.; Senator Robyn Kennedy; Representative Lindsay Sabadosa; Latawnda Brown, Project HOPE; Amy Arrell, Open Sky Community Services; Christina Furtado, Waystone Health and Human Services; and C. Mike Wilson, Justice Resource Institute.



Kathleen Jordan, president & CEO of Seven Hills Foundation, embraces Board Chair Chris White, president & CEO of Road to Responsibility, after receiving the 2026 Chair's Award.

EDITORIAL



William Yelenak
President / Publisher

Unshaken in Purpose — for 51 years and counting

Think about the person who makes you want to do this work.

That's what I asked a sold-out ballroom at the Boston Marriott Copley Place to do on Oct. 26, as the Providers' Council opened our 51st Annual Convention & Expo: *Unshaken in Purpose*. Some pictured a person their organization supports. Others thought of a coworker who took them under their wing when they were just starting out. For many of us, it was someone in our own family.

My person is my son Billy.

Earlier this year, Billy celebrated his 10th birthday. He went on a hike, swam in the ocean, had lunch at a restaurant, played catch on the beach and got on a plane. For most kids his age, that's simply a great birthday. For Billy, who was diagnosed with autism as a toddler, each of those moments is the result of years of support from human services organizations in Massachusetts.

Thom Child & Family Services came first, with an in-home early intervention program shortly after his diagnosis. The May Institute provided him ABA services and helped him find his voice. A Charles River Center program called Wings for Autism walked him through an airport and onto a plane long before he ever took off. Organizations like Advocates and Northeast Arc do that same kind of work for families across the state, from helping restaurants welcome people with autism to covering the cost of swim lessons for children in early intervention.

I share my story because every person in that ballroom had one of their own.

Purpose, as I noted from the podium that morning, is the easy part to talk about. Most people in the room found theirs in about three seconds.

Staying unshaken is harder.

It means coming back after a tough day and starting again the next morning. It means being the steady one for your team and for the people you serve, even when a lot around you isn't steady. This year asked more of providers than most, and no one in this sector needs to be told why. Our members kept the doors open anyway. For 51 years, that's what being *Unshaken in Purpose* has looked like.

The day itself was built to celebrate that. EOHHS Sec. Kiame Mahaniah opened our program with an inspirational poem, and we're grateful for his partnership and for joining us once again. Keynote speaker Cam F. Awesome — a 12-time national champion boxer and former captain of Team USA — talked about building a champion's mindset and getting back up after being knocked down, a fitting message for a room full of people who have spent the year doing exactly that.

At lunch, we honored people who live that theme every day. Christina Furtado of Waystone Health and Human Services, Emmanuel Nwaoha of Vinfen and C. Mike Wilson of Justice Resource Institute received our Gerry Wright Direct Service Employee of the Year Awards. Sen. Robyn Kennedy and Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa were named our Legislators of the Year, and we're thankful for their work on behalf of this sector on Beacon Hill. We also recognized supervisors and managers who are critical to successes across our member organizations, as well as a CEO, an advocate, a volunteer, a business partner and Peer Provider honorees.

For the second year in a row, we awarded $50,000 in scholarships to nine emerging leaders — case managers, counselors, supervisors and direct service staff pursuing degrees while they work. Our largest, the $10,000 Graduate Leadership Scholarship, went to Eduardo "Eddy" Pagán, a youth support specialist at Open Sky Community Services who is pursuing his Master of Social Work at Boston University.

The convention sold out again, drawing 1,200 colleagues, friends and partners to the single largest one-day gathering of human services professionals in the Northeast. Attendees chose from 39 workshops across three blocks, matching last year's record and maintaining a format preferred by more than 85 percent of 2025 attendees. More than 70 exhibitors filled our Expo, sharing information and resources with attendees and helping to save them time and money.

None of it happens without our Diamond sponsor, USI, and our Platinum sponsor, Advocates, along with all of our sponsors and exhibitors. We're grateful as well to our Board of Directors, led by Chair Chris White; our Education & Convention Committee, chaired by Colleen Holmes of Viability; and the Council's small but mighty staff.

If you missed the convention, there are still plenty of ways to get involved with the Council and help move our sector forward. One of the biggest is The Caring Force, the advocacy initiative we launched almost 15 years ago to push for better rates for programs and higher salaries for workers. We signed up new members throughout the day and premiered a new Caring Force orientation video, filmed this year at several of our regional rallies and the State House. Watch it at thecaringforce.org, and consider showing it at your new employee orientations so every new hire knows there's a cause they can join.

I closed my morning remarks by asking everyone to tell their tablemates at lunch about the person they had pictured — and to ask about theirs. If you weren't there, I'd ask the same of you. Think of yours, and hold on to them. They're the reason we do this work for the hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents who rely on this sector every day, and the reason it has remained *Unshaken in Purpose* — for 51 years and counting.



CHRISTINA DARLING, *NFI MASSACHUSETTS*
2026 T-SHIRT DESIGN CONTEST WINNER

Pictured above is the winning design from the 2nd Annual Caring Force T-Shirt Contest. Created by Christina Darling from NFI Massachusetts, this design is inspired by The Caring Force's upcoming 15th anniversary. If you are interested in purchasing a T-shirt with this design, please visit thecaringforce.org.

Want to highlight the artwork of your program participants? Contact Maureen at mlynch@providers.org for more information.

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Fashion Forward: Where confidence takes center stage

By Lisa Morgan

Sometimes, the most meaningful ideas begin with a simple conversation.

For Nicole Pereira, senior director at Kennedy-Donovan Center (KDC), that moment came when an individual supported by KDC mentioned her dream of becoming a model, inspired by Madeline Stuart, an internationally recognized model with Down syndrome.

The comment stayed with Pereira. Rather than dismissing the dream as something out of reach, she began imagining how KDC could make it a reality.

"I went home that night and thought, 'I can make this happen,'" said Pereira.

And with that, Fashion Forward was born.

What began as an ambitious idea has grown into an annual fashion show celebrating individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, giving them an opportunity to express themselves, build confidence and experience the excitement of being in the spotlight.

TURNING A DREAM INTO REALITY

Pereira brought her idea to her team, and together they began brainstorming how to create an unforgettable experience. What initially seemed like a small fashion show quickly evolved into something much bigger.

Through the generosity of community partners, including local fashion designers connected through designer Zavia Empey, the inaugural Fashion Forward came to life. Freestyle Living generously donated the venue and food, helping create an extraordinary experience for participants and their families.

The first event filled the venue with family members, friends and community supporters eager to cheer on the models. But the true magic happened on the runway.

During rehearsals, many participants were nervous, walking quickly and hesitantly as they practiced. By showtime, everything had changed.

"There were hair flips, hat tips and twirls," Pereira recalled. "The confidence they gained was amazing."

Each participant selected their own outfit, chose the music accompanying their walk, and wrote a personal biography to be shared with the audience. Every detail was designed to celebrate their individuality.

For Pereira, the experience represented something far greater than fashion.

"Sometimes when people with disabilities go into the community, they get funny looks or people stare," she said. "But during this event, the stares were full of joy and acceptance and beauty."

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE RUNWAY

For participant Amber Cooper, Fashion Forward offered an opportunity to step outside her comfort zone and discover something new about herself.

"I was really happy to be part of the fashion show! It's not something I would normally do, and I was pretty nervous about walking in front of everyone. But the KDC staff helped me feel comfortable and gave me the confidence to give it a try," said Cooper. "I ended up having so much fun, and I'm really proud of myself for trying something new. I'm so glad I did it!"

Cooper's experience captures the spirit of Fashion Forward: creating opportunities

FASHION FORWARD, see page 11







Fashion Forward provides a backdrop for the creativity and individuality of persons served to step into the spotlight.

Helping families afford to eat is work we share

By Kevin Reed

The rent is due. The car needs a repair. A parent's work hours have been cut. To cover expenses, people postpone purchases, push payments past due dates and add to credit card balances. Each adjustment buys just a little more time, until they face a question no person or family should have to answer: How much is left for food?

As executive director of Making Opportunity Count, a community action agency serving the North Central region, I've been thinking about how those competing expenses shape a family's ability to afford groceries. Our community needs assessment, conducted this past summer, brought that connection into focus: nearly a third of respondents answering a question about their most urgent needs selected being able to afford healthy food. Access to food is only part of the challenge. People also need enough room in their budgets to afford it.

Making Opportunity Count does not operate a food pantry. Instead, we work with community partners whose expertise connects families with food when they need it. Those relationships are essential. So is recognizing that food affordability belongs in our work, even when food distribution is not one of our services. While connecting someone with a pantry or meal program can bring immediate relief, it also gives us reason to ask what else is putting pressure on that household's budget and where we can contribute.

Heating assistance, help with child care costs and stable, affordable housing can ease the expenses competing with groceries. Employment supports and connections to benefits can help strengthen the income and resources available to meet those needs. No food changes hands through those services, but their effects can still reach the dinner table. Those supports cannot close every gap,

AFFORDABILITY, see page 11

Nourishment and connection: How Victory Programs fights food insecurity this holiday season

By Andre Swai

This time of year is always tough for the Victory Programs, Inc. (VPI) community, and this year is no different. As the holiday season begins and we plan trips to visit loved ones, buy presents ahead of the winter holidays, and plaster our living and work spaces with festive decor, far too many members of our community are simply focused on survival. With rising costs and federal cuts to life-saving services fueling the ongoing affordability crisis, this holiday season will feel radically different for many.

According to the sixth annual Massachusetts Food Access Report from The Greater Boston Food Bank and Mass General Brigham, a record 40 percent of Massachusetts households, approximately 1.1 million households, experienced food insecurity in 2025. Given the economic and political developments over the last year, this number is likely to rise further. Amid these grave economic conditions, food banks have seen increased demand, with 56 percent of food-insecure households relying on them in 2025.

VPI is a Boston-based nonprofit that has served people impacted by homelessness, HIV and substance use for the past 51 years. We help ease this burden and do what we can to ensure every Bostonian can put food on the table. The Boston Living Center is at the heart of this mission. The Boston Living Center, or the BLC as regulars call it, is a VPI program that combines nutrition, peer support, wellness programming and trusted care navigation under one roof. In the last year alone, the Boston Living Center has served more than 38,500 meals through our breakfast, lunch and dinner services. At the Boston Living Center, we don't just provide

FOOD INSECURITY, see page 11

Cardinal Cushing Centers' MarketPlace blends job training and community connection

By Amanda Cease

Cardinal Cushing Centers was founded in 1947 by then-Archbishop Richard Cushing and the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi from Wisconsin. It started out as St. Coletta by the Sea, later became the Coletta School for Exceptional Children and was eventually renamed Cardinal Cushing Centers in honor of its co-founder.

Now, in its 80th year, Cushing supports approximately 400 students and adults on any given day and is one of the largest employers on the South Shore with approximately 600 employees, providing a variety of programs, including academics, clinical and behavioral services, physical, occupational and speech therapies, employment training, recreational opportunities and housing. In Hanover, Cushing operates a day and residential school; in Braintree they operate a day school. They also operate 15 group homes for adults over age 22 across the South Shore and offer two adult services programs providing employment training and therapeutic activities, with locations in Hanover and Braintree.

"I've been here for nearly 30 years and so much has changed in that time," notes Cushing President and CEO Michelle Markowitz. "It's hard to imagine that in the beginning it was only a handful of students and a group of dedicated sisters from Wisconsin, who were called here by the then-Archbishop Cushing."

The sisters instilled into the mission of the school the same principles that Franciscan faith is based on, including:

Community: We respect the strengths of each person, foster caring relationships and kindness and friendship.

Creativity: We encourage independent thinking, learning and initiatives where solutions and approaches can be different than the current ones.

Stewardship: We collectively are responsible to oversee and improve the performance of our organization to ensure longevity for future generations.

Accountability: We accept personal responsibility to efficiently use organizational resources, improve our services and systems and help others improve their effectiveness.

While much has changed since its founding, one of the most profound updates to Cushing's Hanover neighborhood happened in 2020, when Cushing's MarketPlace opened. Consisting of 20,000 square feet of state-of-the-art classrooms as well as public-facing retail shops that double as job training sites, the Cushing MarketPlace includes a café, gift boutique, thrift shop, garden shop and greenhouse. Visible from the main road and easy to ac-

MARKETPLACE, see page 11



As a way to learn marketable skills that can lead to future employment, Cardinal Cushing Centers' students and adults create handmade gifts to sell in their Unique Boutique.

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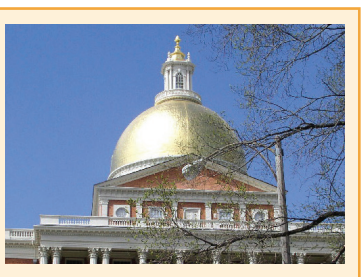
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A View from the Hill

A commentary from a legislator on human services



Local expertise, local solutions: Rethinking Massachusetts' response to homelessness

By Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa

Every month, the call starts the same way. We go around the Zoom room, and shelters across Western Massachusetts report their capacity. The answer is almost always the same: full, wait list, no beds.

The meeting brings together human service providers from Hampshire, Franklin, Berkshire and Hampden counties, along with municipal and state officials. We discuss what is working, where the system is falling short, and what we might accomplish by working together. Those conversations have reinforced an important lesson: the people closest to the housing crisis often have the clearest understanding of both its challenges and its potential solutions.

Consider a couple I recently spoke with. They lost their housing after a parent died. Despite years of working in human services themselves, they did not have the savings to afford another home. They put their names on every housing list they could find, but while they waited, they began camping.

They could seek shelter, but doing so would mean being separated. After decades together, they could not bear the thought of sleeping apart. They chose to remain outside together rather than be sheltered separately.

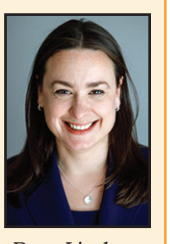
Their circumstances illustrate a difficult truth: the existence of a service does not necessarily mean it is a workable solution. We can create programs with the best intentions and still fail to account for the realities of the people they are meant to serve. A bed may be available, but that alone does not resolve the circumstances that led someone to lose their home.

Human service providers understand these shortcomings because they encounter them every day. They know where people get stuck, which requirements become barriers, and where existing programs leave gaps. Just as importantly, they understand the resources within their communities and the opportunities to bring them together.

A housing provider may have an available unit but lack the support services needed to help someone remain there. A municipality may have an underused property but not the capacity to turn it into housing. A nonprofit may have the expertise and community relationships to make the project possible. Each organization has part of the answer. The challenge is creating the conditions for them to work together.

Too often, we begin with a state program and ask communities to fit their problems into it. We should reverse that approach. Rather than prescribing a uniform response, the Commonwealth should give local partners the resources and flexibility to develop solutions grounded in the needs and circumstances of their communities.

This does not mean abandoning standards or accountability. The state should establish clear goals, provide meaningful resources and measure whether those goals are being met. Communities should have greater discretion over how they achieve them. If a local partnership can prevent an eviction, keep someone housed, reduce reliance on emergency shelter or move people into permanent housing, those results should matter more than whether its approach conforms to an existing program.



Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa

Making that possible requires more flexible funding. Municipalities and nonprofit organizations should have the opportunity to develop proposals together, combine resources across programs, and test approaches that respond to local needs. Successful projects can be expanded or adapted elsewhere. Those that fall short can be evaluated and improved. Not every idea will work, but communities cannot develop better solutions if they are never given the opportunity to try.

Western Massachusetts illustrates why this flexibility matters. The housing challenges facing Northampton are not the same as those confronting a rural hilltown. Housing stock, transportation, rental markets, available services and local resources vary considerably across the region. A response that works in one community may be impractical in another.

Local governments and nonprofit organizations understand these differences because they work within them every day. They know which resources are available, where the greatest needs exist, and what obstacles stand in the way of progress. They should not have to wait for a statewide template before responding to problems they are already equipped to understand.

To be clear, the state has an essential role to play. We must invest in housing and support the human service workers who help people access and maintain it. We must also remove unnecessary barriers that prevent organizations from coordinating their work or putting promising ideas into practice. But the Commonwealth does not need to design every solution. Its responsibility is to establish priorities, provide the resources, and create the flexibility for local partners to do what they know is needed.

The providers who join that monthly call are not simply reporting how full their shelters have become. They are sharing what they have learned, identifying opportunities, and looking for ways to make their communities more effective in responding to homelessness. Their experience is an essential resource, and our policies should reflect that.

We cannot expect communities to solve a crisis while limiting them to the tools and approaches that have brought us to this point. We need to trust the people closest to the problem, give them room to work together, and judge their efforts by whether they make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

Representative Lindsay Sabadosa represents the 1st Hampshire district in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

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.

MARKETPLACE: Cardinal Cushing Centers' innovative hub for vocational training

Continued from page 9

cess, the MarketPlace has transformed how Cushing provides vocational training opportunities and how it becomes part of the greater community.

The MarketPlace serves four primary functions:

JOB TRAINING

The MarketPlace was created as a vocational training ground for students between the ages of 18 and 22, who were ready to learn valuable, employable skills. By teaching these students the skills required to work in the food and beverage industry, in retail or in gardening / farming, Cushing knew that this would boost self-confidence, independence and prepare them for the next phase of life — joining the workforce.

COMMUNITY

The MarketPlace shops were also created to bring the outside world in. Historically, students and adults with intellectual disabilities are surrounded only by other people with disabilities or living in isolation. One of Cushing's missions was and is to provide opportunities for our exceptional population to mingle with the greater community, which teaches inclusion and understanding. What's more, South Shore residents benefit from having a one-stop shop for baked goods, gifts and flowers while our students and adults benefit from the increased traffic this new location will provide.

BEING TOGETHER

The MarketPlace shops are the perfect place for older students and adults to work side by side, with the adults mentoring the students. It is also the perfect place for our wonderful neighbors, who live in apartment complexes within Cushing's neighborhood, to come together with each other, socialize and enjoy an affordable meal.

FUNDING

The MarketPlace is a green building that helps save energy costs, and it brings in a revenue stream that was not previously available — ensuring sustainable funding for maintenance in the future.

Whether stopping by to grab a delicious breakfast or lunch, a thoughtful gift, or browsing racks of pre-loved clothing, the MarketPlace is a destination for anyone looking to help Cushing realize its mission to support those with intellectual disabilities.

Amanda Cease is the marketing and communications coordinator at Cardinal Cushing Centers.

eACADEMY®: Council's online learning system adds DDS courses

Continued from page 1

evidence-based practices, collaboration techniques, and the practical application of PBS principles."

eAcademy® added two sets of four courses to its catalog in 2026. During the summer, eAcademy® rolled out the first four courses as part of an "Introduction to Positive Behavior Supports" series, which provides a basic framework for positive behavior supports (PBS). The courses included an update to a previously existing introductory course, "Positive Behavior Supports 101" and three new courses: "Universal Supports," "Targeted and Intensive Supports" and "Understanding Function of Behavior and Providing Universal Supports." The full course list includes:

- MA DDS PBS Module 1: Positive Behavior Supports 101
- MA DDS PBS Module 2: Universal Supports
- MA DDS PBS Module 3: Targeted and Intensive Supports
- MA DDS PBS Module 4: Understanding Function of Behavior and Providing Universal Supports
- Advanced PBS Concepts 1: Targeted PBS Plans
- Advanced PBS Concepts 2: Intensive PBS Plans
- Advanced PBS Concepts 3: Case Example – Moving Through PBS Tiers of Support
- Writing User-Friendly PBS Plans

Since the first series launched this summer, nearly 4,000 staff have taken the courses in the series, averaging around 1,000 learners per course.

The second set of courses was added to eAcademy® in October. The new series covers practical applications of PBS, including writing and implementing plans, regulations and laws surrounding how plans are developed, and who is involved in the process. Three of the courses target managers and supervisors, while "Writing User-Friendly PBS Plans" is intended for PBS-qualified clinicians. Together, the series covers the full range of people involved in a client's care.

All eight courses were developed by DDS in collaboration with the Center for Developmental Disabilities Evaluation and Research (CDDER). CDDER provides training, assessments, and research to public agencies with the goal of improving health, safety and quality of life for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The center is based out of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center at UMass Chan Medical School.

All the courses are currently available through the eAcademy® library. For more information on eAcademy® courses or how to subscribe to the Council's online learning management system, please contact Dave Cerrone at dcerrone@providers.org.

2027-28 PRIORITIES: Council's impact and what's next

Continued from page 1

allowing eligible workers with associate, bachelor's or master's degrees to apply for repayment, supporting workforce retention and growth. The Council hopes to build on the success of its last loan repayment program – an ARPA-funded effort that provided a one-time benefit for human services workers in early 2024. Requests from human services workers totaled nearly four times the $16.5 million allocated. It provided relief to over 700 workers but left many without assistance.

Along with its continued advocacy around those initiatives, the Council will include additional items in its legislative priorities for FY '28. This fall, the Council surveyed its membership for insights into key legislative items that are impacting organizations. Members noted several items they'd like the Council to explore adding to its public policy priorities, including reforming Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML), amending the tax and fringe rate used in Chapter 257 rate setting to include funding for retirement, working toward a multi-state licensure compact for some positions, and advancing open and transparent rate setting for family shelter programs, which are under EOHLC and outside of Chapter 257.

Additionally, the Council has supported Election Day voter registration, which appeared on the Nov. 3 ballot as Question 4.

The Council will share more information about its full legislative agenda and policy priorities ahead of the next legislative session, which starts Jan. 6, 2027. For more information or to suggest other items, please contact Caroline O'Neill at coneill@providers.org.

FASHION FORWARD: KDC's fashion show shines a spotlight on individuality

Continued from page 9

for individuals to challenge themselves, experience joy, and recognize their own potential.

BUILDING ON THE MAGIC

Now in its second year, Fashion Forward continues to evolve, creating new opportunities for creativity, community involvement and self-expression.

This year's event embraces the idea that fashion doesn't have to be expensive to be fabulous. Thanks to the generosity of CapeAbilities Thrift Store, Miss Louise Prom Closet and St. David's Episcopal Church Thrift Shop, participants have enjoyed selecting outfits that reflect their personalities and styles. These community partners went above and beyond, opening their doors outside regular business hours so everyone could take their time finding the perfect look.

The creativity extends beyond the runway. This year, an individual supported by KDC contributed original artwork for the event program. Even more exciting, some individuals who attended last year's show as audience members are participating as models this year.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Pereira hopes to expand Fashion Forward through partnerships with local high schools and community colleges, inviting students to collaborate with participants on original clothing designs. She also envisions incorporating artwork created by individuals supported by KDC into future fashion collections.

At its heart, Fashion Forward reflects KDC's mission to empower and support individuals in realizing their full potential.

For Pereira, watching the event come to life is a powerful reminder of why she chose this work.

"When the work is hard and I feel frustrated, events like this help me continue," she said. "This fills my soul up."

And for the models who step onto the runway, Fashion Forward delivers something equally meaningful: the opportunity to shine, exactly as they are.

Lisa Morgan is the president & CEO of Kennedy-Donovan Center

AFFORDABILITY: Combating food insecurity takes a village

Continued from page 9

but they can help reduce the pressure.

For some families, seeking food assistance may follow months of quietly cutting back or taking on debt. That can include, especially right now given the rising costs, middle-income households facing instability for the first time and uncertain where to turn. They may know about a local pantry without knowing that other supports exist, assume they earn too much or believe help is reserved for someone in worse circumstances.

A request for food can open a conversation about those other pressures. It also reminds us why making resources visible, understandable and approachable matters before a family reaches that point. That means explaining what assistance is available, who may qualify, and how to get started in ways people can recognize as relevant to their own lives. The availability of a program means little to someone who has never heard of it or has already concluded it could not be for them.

Providers across our communities already recognize these connections. What our assessment reinforced for me is the importance of carrying that understanding into decisions about Making Opportunity Count's own response. A community need does not always arrive neatly matched to a program we operate, but we still have to consider where our expertise, resources and partnerships can make a difference.

The urgency we feel when a parent cannot afford dinner also belongs to the circumstances that made dinner unaffordable. An unexpected medical bill, lost work hours, or the cost of keeping a car on the road can put that meal out of reach. Looking at the whole picture helps us recognize the full reach of our work and our responsibility to contribute.

As rising costs put groceries further out of reach for families, food pantries and meal providers should not have to shoulder the response alone. At Making Opportunity Count, we stand alongside you, bringing the tools we have — heating assistance, child care, housing supports, benefit enrollment and employment services — to help families meet their expenses and strengthen their financial stability. Our services may look different, but we share a commitment to the same families and the same communities. Helping them afford to eat is work we carry together.

Kevin Reed is the executive director of Making Opportunity Count.

FOOD INSECURITY: Feeding hope this holiday season

Continued from page 9

food; we provide an opportunity to connect with peers over a nutritious meal. Thanks to our in-house dietitian and nutritionist, we carefully select each meal to ensure it's not only tasty, but nutritious.

In conjunction with our meal services, the Boston Living Center offers food pantry services on a bi-weekly basis to meet the needs of those struggling with hunger and food insecurity. These pantry packages include a variety of items, including protein, perishable and non-perishable goods. Thanks to the generosity of our food recovery partners who donate produce and other items, the Boston Living Center is able to provide for those in our community who need our help. When the biweekly service does not meet the needs of some, we step in where we can with emergency bags for those in dire and extenuating situations.

This time of year is tough for Victory Programs because we see firsthand how difficult the holidays often are for the people we serve. While every situation is different, many of our members who are HIV-positive, food-insecure, or homeless are isolated. Often without a family to lean on in times of need, either for material or emotional support, our members turn to the Boston Living Center, where they can connect with peers and their chosen family during the holiday season. On major holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, we adjust our typical meal service to match the ethos of the holiday at hand, such as with our turkey dinners and holiday ham.

We'd like to highlight the story of a man named "Noah". Noah is a gentleman living in one of our Low Threshold Transitional Housing sites. He's a kind, gentle man with a bright smile that can brighten any room. Noah also happens to be HIV positive, and struggles to find meals outside of the Boston Living Center. For Noah, the Boston Living Center is his primary source of food. Given his medication regimen, food is essential to its effectiveness and our nutrition team is happy to accommodate his needs.

As the holiday season rolls around, we encourage everyone reading this to give back to your community. Now more than ever, seek out ways to help. Whether through financial donations to Victory Programs or similar nonprofit organizations, supporting local emergency food networks with food donations, or volunteering your time and energy for this dire mission. Every person can make an impact, and around the holiday season, our communities need your help.

Andre Swai is the executive assistant & communications associate at Victory Programs, Inc.

ALEX
Academy for Learning and Exchange

Calendar of Events • November 2026

What: **Community Webinar: Intersecting Identities – Working with Queer Autistic Clients**
When: Tuesday, November 3
Time: 12:00 to 1:30 p.m.
Presenters: Allie Scheer, LICSW
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: $15 for NASW Members; $42 for Non-NASW Member

What: **Free, Members-Only Webinar: Explore Your GrantStation Member Benefits**
When: Wednesday, November 4
Time: 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Presenters: David Gates, Senior Director of Online Education, GrantStation
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members-Only

What: **Stability Planning: Finding Firm Ground When the Work Can't Stop**
When: Wednesday, November 4
Time: 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Presenters: Julia Monaghan, Founder & Principal, People Centered Change
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: $50 for Council Members; $125 for Non-members

What: **Free, Members-Only Webinar: Strategic Self-Disclosure for Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**
When: Thursday, November 12
Time: 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.
Presenters: Lydia Carbone, Director of Training and Alessandra Lopes, Manager of Training, Parenting Journey
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members-Only

What: **Associate Member Webinar: Labor Law Update & Recent Developments – What Every Employer Needs to Know**
When: Tuesday, November 17
Time: 8:00 to 9:30 a.m.
Presenters: Hirsch Roberts Weinstein LLP Labor Relations Team
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free

What: **Conducting Effective Internal Investigations**
When: Tuesday, November 17
Time: 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Presenters: Jean Haertl, CEO, Safety and Respect at Work
Where: Providers' Council's Learning Center (100 Crossing Blvd. Suite 100, Framingham, MA 01702)
Cost: $300 for Council Members; $500 for Non-members

What: **Provider Member Webinar: Promoting Wellbeing in the Face of Depression and Mental Health Challenges**
When: Wednesday, November 18
Time: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Presenters: Conversations for Caring team
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: $35

What: **Maximize Your Membership: Get to Know Your Providers' Council Member Benefits!**
When: Thursday, November 19
Time: 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.
Presenters: Providers' Council Staff
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free

Pre-registration for these events is required unless otherwise noted. Please visit providers.org/events to learn more and register for the event you wish to attend.
Questions? Call 508.598.9800 or email Nina Lamarre at nlamarre@providers.org



Hirsch Roberts Weinstein attorneys know and understand the nuances of the human services industry and provide practical and sensitive advice. Since 1986, we have proudly worked with human services organizations and their leadership teams to provide tailored human resources guidance and leadership training for executive, managers, and supervisors. For more info, please contact Jeffrey Hirsch at 617-348-4300 or jhirsch@hrwlawyers.com.

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