OPPORTUNITY PROJECT, INC.
Brain Injury Programs and Awareness

Children's Specialized Hospital®
An RWJBarnabas Health facility

OP NEWS

The Opportunity Project Newsletter • 2021-2022



RESILIENCE SQUAD

Members Proudly Supporting Members

See details inside

A Clubhouse Program Empowering People with Brain Injury

WE FORGE AHEAD WITH STRENGTH, POSITIVITY AND RESILIENCE... THANKS TO YOU!

HIGHLIGHTS

How potential meets opportunity:

- Message from the Chairman
- Clubhouse Programs
- Brain Injury Awareness Month 2021
- Special Report & Mental Health Programs

OPPORTUNITY PROJECT, INC.
Brain Injury Programs and Awareness

Children's Specialized Hospital
An RWJBarnabas Health facility

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Juana Guglielmino, MS, OTR/L
Occupational Therapist
Melissa A. Moyer, MS
Nutrition Counselor
Jacqueline Marino-Rizzi, CBIS
Cognitive & Community Integration Counselor
Tom Shea, PsyD
Vocational Counselor
Michelle Slepp, MA, CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist

Message from the Chairman



Marc E. Berson, Esq.
Chairman

Opportunity Project has been providing programs and services to people with brain injury for 27 years, initially operating as a one-day-per-week program back in 1994. Today, we remain the first and only free-standing Clubhouse program in New Jersey. Throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic, we have remained in operation and triumphed.

I am extremely proud of Opportunity Project's growth throughout 2021. OP's Members, survivors of brain injury, and staff didn't just meet a challenge throughout the Clubhouse closure, they transformed an obstacle into an opportunity for individual growth and new programmatic achievement. That's something to celebrate.

During the pandemic, our programs and services were transitioned and expanded to virtual, remote platforms. Our schedule grew to include not only daytime, but evening and weekend programs including new mental health and emotional support groups. Our staff expanded to include a new Speech and Language Pathologist, an amazing addition to an already robust group of professionals. Our team truly worked together to provide the highest level of services, technological support and ongoing communication. Today, Opportunity Project's programs and services not only offer in-person traditional Clubhouse offerings, but remote and "hybrid" choices have been added to accommodate more Members, comfort levels, convenience and physical needs.

As you review OP NEWS, you will see photos and read comments from our Members who are succeeding in all areas: vocational, nutrition, cognitive, community integration, occupational therapy, speech and language and so much more. We are proud of our many community partners without whom we could not assist Members in creating a new life for themselves – one that is meaningful and fulfilling.

Our partnership with Children's Specialized Hospital and RWJBarnabas Health continues to develop as this exciting integration of programs and services continues to offer Opportunity Project many unique resources. Throughout the pandemic. the benefit of research and human resources support along with many other areas of expansion, have proven to be invaluable.

Annual brain injury awareness events and fundraising activities continue to be a critical part of the Clubhouse's efforts. Our 2020 Annual Golf Classic raised $235,000 and Brain Injury Awareness Month events continue to grow focusing on community and corporate brain injury awareness. Opportunity Project serves over 630 people with brain injury and the demand for these services continues to grow. Membership to the Clubhouse is lifelong and our doors are always open. Even with diminished government funding, no member is ever denied services due to lack of financial resources.

It is only with your support that we are able to provide the much needed programs and services to those living with brain injury!

We look forward to the future with anticipation and thank you for all that you do for Opportunity Project.

Marc E. Berson
Chairman



Opportunity Project Founders:
Marc E. Berson, Rita Yohalem and Lisa Goldman

Letter from the Executive Director



Rebecca Gallanter, MSW, LSW
Executive Director

During my two-year tenure at Opportunity Project, our Clubhouse and our world has experienced so many unprecedented events, the pandemic clearly being the most significant and difficult period for so many of us. I am incredibly proud to serve as Executive Director of this wonderful organization, which has consistently been acknowledged as an innovator in the brain injury field. In addition to our stellar professional staff and our outstanding programs and services, Opportunity Project's Clubhouse is a state-of-the-art, technologically advanced space. With the assistance of Children's Specialized Hospital, RWJBarnabas Health, Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey and Hyde and Watson Foundation, the Clubhouse has transformed all areas to include contactless equipment such as sanitization stations, towel dispensers, plumbing and automated restroom doors. Plexiglass and other precautionary items have been added. Technology such as "Smart TVs", computer laptops, iPads and wide angle cameras were acquired to support our "hybrid" programming of both onsite and remote options maximizing the reach of our opportunities for Members. The Clubhouse also boasts a newly-installed air purification system, featuring ultraviolet lighting and backup wall units which eliminate microscopic viruses and bacteria.

LEADING CAUSES OF BRAIN INJURY FOR OP MEMBERS

36%	MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT
33%	ABI OTHER THAN STROKE
18%	ACCIDENT/VIOLENCE
13%	STROKE

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is an alteration in brain function, or other evidence of brain pathology, caused by an external force. Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) is an injury to the brain that has occurred after birth. Examples include stroke, aneurysm and tumor.

We successfully provide adults with brain injury opportunities to build cognitive skills, vocational skills, self-esteem and confidence in their ability to accomplish productive activities and to lead fulfilling lives. Although our staff have always supported the mental health needs of Members and their families, services have expanded to include specific mental health check-ins and group activities, Member-to-Member mentoring and workshops. Members also support one another technologically via the Tech Support Team, an invaluable resource during recent months. Staffing has increased to include our highly skilled Speech and Language Pathologist and second Occupational Therapist. Our repertoire even includes our own YouTube channel!

We are very grateful to our many supporters and proud to have received funding this past year for major initiatives from the Kessler Foundation, County of Essex, Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, Hyde and Watson Foundation, Smart Family Foundation, Investors Bank Foundation, The Wawa Foundation, Dircks Foundation, Fred C Rummel Foundation and the Small Business Administration. We thank our community partners who sponsor brain injury awareness events, support our fundraising efforts and remember us via tributes.

Opportunity Project has recently been honored with a "shout-out" from New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy during a televised briefing and our organization and Members were featured in ROI-NJ, Think Tank with Steve Adubato and other publications. Also, CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) has certified Opportunity Project with "no recommendations" during our most recent evaluation. Only 3% of accredited organizations achieve this goal, which is a testament to the quality of our programs and services.

"Like" and "follow" us on social media to be apprised of the latest developments. We love providing Member-led tours of our beautiful location, please be in touch to arrange a visit! Thank you for your ongoing support...and for making all of this possible!

Rebecca Gallanter, MSW, LSW
Executive Director



New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy highlighted OP's work during his May 17 Coronavirus Briefing.

About the Clubhouse

Recovery from brain injury is lifelong. OP's Clubhouse Program provides a peer-driven supportive environment for people with brain injury who are seeking the next step in their journey to recovery. We offer challenges, experiences and encouragement through a work-ordered day to assist Members in adjusting to and creating "a new normal." **Our program is divided into units, incorporating all operations and activities.**

- **Cognitive and Community Integration Unit:** Activities and training in cognitive skills, mental health, community resources and socialization.
- **Nutrition Unit:** Builds a culture of health through education, healthy cooking, fitness and community partnerships.
- **Occupational Therapy Unit:** Focuses on maximizing independence with every day tasks.
- **Social Work Unit:** Assists with funding, housing, self-advocacy and other life issues.
- **Vocational Unit::** Work evaluation, training and job coaching.
- **Speech-Language Therapy Unit:** ***New to the Clubhouse!*** Focuses on facilitating better communication to make meaningful connections.

More than 5 million Americans live with the after-effects of brain injury. Effects of TBI can include impaired thinking or memory, movement, sensation (e.g., vision or hearing), or emotional functioning (e.g., personality changes, depression). These issues can have lasting effects on individuals, families and communities.

Special thank you to Michael Moran, Program Director and our OPMC for inspiring and leading the program through this challenging year!

Social Work

The Social Work Unit provides one-to-one counseling sessions and adjustment groups to improve self-advocacy and self-care for Members.

Oneka Cyrus, Social Worker, advocates on behalf of Members, their families and caregivers to obtain necessary authorizations and resources for enrollment into the Opportunity Project Clubhouse. She also assists Members with funding, housing, transportation and other issues that affect their quality of life.

Group discussions are fun and interactive, providing tips and strategies in various topics including: Life's Challenges, Don't Take it Personal and Morning Rituals.

Several Members recently secured their first apartment with assistance from our Social Worker, exemplifying the strength of our community resources for housing.



DaVante secures his first apartment
He works diligently with OP's Occupational Therapist on strategies to improve his independence. Also, due to his success as a Plumbing Sales Associate at Home Depot, he is being hired for local plumbing jobs!

Potential new members should contact Oneka Cyrus at ocyrus@opportunityproject.org

Vocational

Thanks to you, 44% of OP's Vocational Program Members are currently employed vs. the 35% average employment rate for people with disabilities. In addition, the employment retention rate for our Vocational Program Members is 100%.

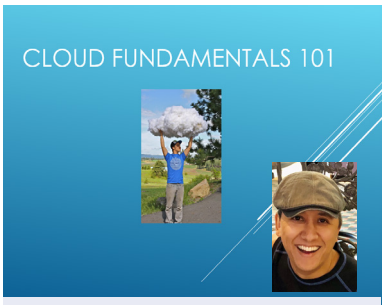
Under the expert leadership of **Tom Shea, PsyD.**, Vocational Counselor, the Vocational Program continues to ensure vocational success for Members by helping them explore and pursue their talents and interests while building job readiness skills as well as providing employment training and job coaching support. These hands-on experiences are critical for success at paid employment jobs.



Steven pursues his interest in technology
Steven gained customer service and technical support skills with his active role on the OP Technical Support Team.



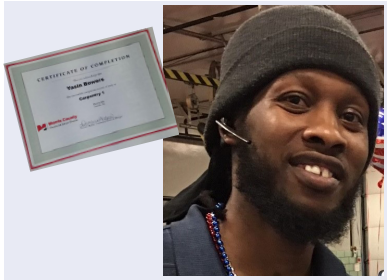
Abigail explores her creative side
Abigail learned how to create and sew tote bags that she will market.



Jesse excels at leading the OP Tech Support Team
Jesse has gained strong prevocational experience for competitive employment as the leader of the OP Technical Support Team.



John reconnects with his love of woodworking
John worked with OP's Occupational Therapist on his motor skills to build a model boat and repair a table.



Yasin receives his Carpentry Certification!
Completing the Carpentry Program is another great milestone on Yasin's journey towards vocational success!



Karma develops cooking and gardening skills
Karma learned how to plant a vegetable garden and cook healthy recipes by working with OP's Nutrition Counselor.

Thank you to our employment and volunteer partners:

The Beth Greenhouse
Newark Beth Israel Medical Center
Carpet House
Children's Specialized Hospital
Home Depot
La Strada Nuova Millburn
Millburn Free Public Library
Montclair Art Museum
New Eyes for the Needy
Rock 'n' Joe of Millburn
RWJBarnabas Health
Sage Eldercare
WAE Center
Walgreens
Whole Foods

If you are interested in becoming an employment or volunteer partner, please contact Tom Shea, PsyD., Vocational Counselor at tshea@opportunityproject.org

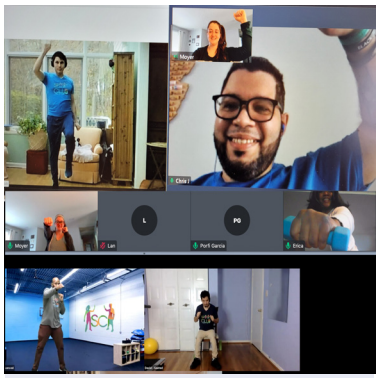
Nutrition, Health & Wellness

Research indicates that integrating nutritional foods into our diets and keeping our bodies active are critical for optimal brain heath. This year marks the 10th anniversary of our Nutrition Unit. **Melissa Moyer,** Nutrition Counselor, leads the charge on building a culture of health at the Clubhouse. Members participate in group and individual activities such as cooking, health and nutrition education, fitness classes and community integration outings.

We recently partnered with Spirit Club, an online fitness program that provides several variations of each exercise routine to engage individuals with varying physical abilities. This partnership would not have been possible without the fundraising efforts of our very own Member, Christopher! Thank you to all of our Members and supporters for allowing us to provide these outstanding services to help improve the overall wellness of our Members and their families!



Members cook delicious and healthy meals in cooking class.



Virtual exercise classes keep us fit and active.

NEW! Speech - Language Therapy

Michelle Slepp, Speech-Language Pathologist, focuses on facilitating better communication to make meaningful connections...*Communication is the basis of our ability to connect with one another; after a brain injury, many aspects of communication can be disrupted and made more difficult.*

Members participate in individual speech-language therapy sessions targeting improving speech intelligibility, fluency of speech, word-finding, reading, writing, attention, organization, and more!

In the Clear Communication Group shown below, Members work on understanding conversation basics and how to improve communicative effectiveness, using tools such as mindfulness. *This group is a little bit of learning better ways to communicate, a little bit of practicing skills in a supportive environment, and lots of fun,* Michelle said.

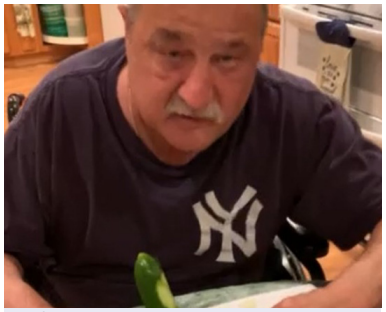


Occupational Therapy

Michael Moran and **Juana Guglielmino**, Occupational Therapists, help Members focus on utilizing compensatory strategies, adapting the environment, and modifying tasks, in order to maximize independence and improve performance in daily activities. Teletherapy allows OT to occur in the Members' natural environments, thus promoting stronger carryover in task performance. Members continue to improve skills including time management, meal preparation, home maintenance, and prevocational skills - all vital components for recovery and community reintegration after a brain injury.



MJ uses skills learned in OT to make a sandwich.



Bob uses OT strategies to increase independence in meal preparation.

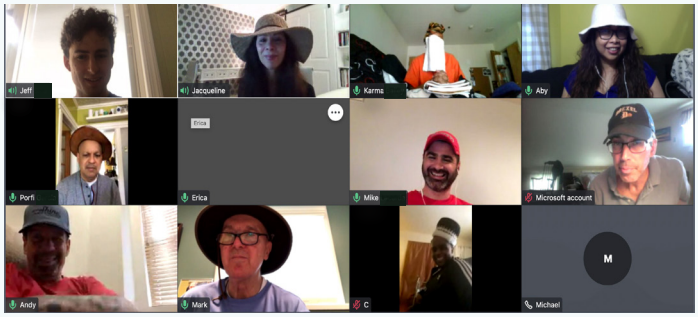


Chris improves visual memory using art.

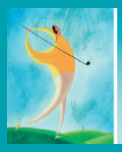
Cognitive & Community Integration

The Cognitive & Community Integration Unit focuses on helping Members build strong emotional balances, socialization skills and meaningful relationships. Members are succeeding at feeling hopeful, confident and positive by engaging in various support groups.

Although OP has always supported the emotional well-being of Members, families and caregivers, the need for assistance greatly increased during the pandemic. **Jacqueline Marino-Rizzi**, Cognitive and Community Integration Skills Counselor, spearheaded various new mental health initiatives including Mental Health Mondays Groups, OP's Mentorship and Resilience Squad Programs. See more details in the Special Report.



Members joined OP's Cognitive Counselor for a "Hats Off to You" Self-Esteem & Team Building Group.



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GOLF CLASSIC

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2020 Annual Golf Classic





The Golf Classic raises funds that go directly towards





our brain injury programs and awareness activities.





Despite the Pandemic, in 2020 we raised over $235,000!





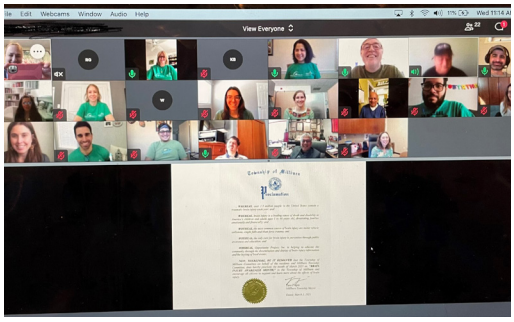
2021 Brain Injury Awareness Month

Thank you for your help in raising $57,000 for Brain Injury Awareness Month!

Funds go directly towards our brain injury programs and prevention.

Brain Injury Awareness Month launched with Millburn Mayor Tara Prupis' virtual proclamation presentation declaring March 2021 Brain Injury Awareness Month in Millburn. Throughout the month, Opportunity Project invited community members to a number of virtual informative and enjoyable awareness and fundraising events. We had a great time preparing a delicious meal at our Cooking Class with Chef Danny Arturo and painting at the fun Paint & Sip event with talented art instructor Lucy Santiago. OP also engaged the community by hosting a brain injury prevention presentation at Millburn Township's Bike Week.

Various organizations, supporters and OP Members hosted Blue Jean Days and creative fundraisers, making this our most successful Brain Injury Awareness Month yet!



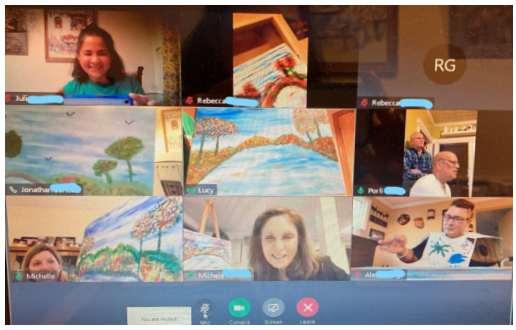
Mayor Tara Prupis presented the proclamation.



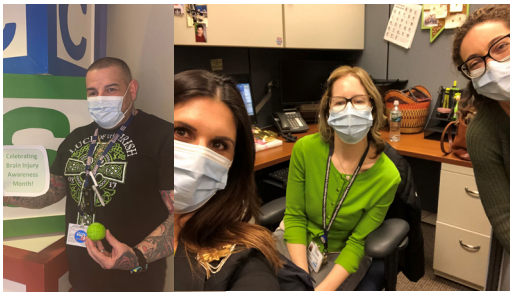
Thanks Chef Danny Arturo for a great Cooking Class!



Thanks Zuri and OP Member Jovanna for your Rockin' Fundraiser!



We loved the Paint & Sip – thanks Lucy Santiago!



Thanks Children's Specialized Hospital for a great Blue Jean Day!



We had a great turnout for Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi's Fundraising Event!

Thank you to the OP Administrative Team:
Beth Daugherty, Tracy Lahey and Julie London

Thank you to our sponsors!

MARCH IS BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

Cooking Class Sponsors
Bank of America Private Bank
Newark Beth Israel Medical Center

Paint & Sip Sponsors
Sobel Family Foundation
Sudler Family Foundation

OP Speakers Bureau Sponsor
The Fidelco Group

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Zuri Fadul and Jovanna Cedeno
Lisa Goldman

To participate in March 2022 Brain Injury Awareness Month email:
jlondon@opportunityproject.org

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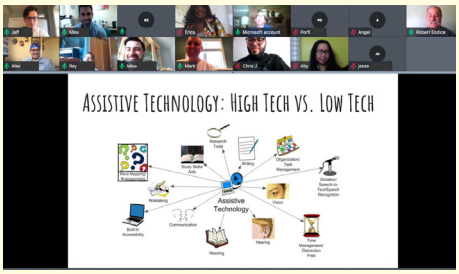
Member News

OP launched a new YouTube channel with the help of Member Jesse! It includes educational videos as well as tips and strategies to increase independence for individuals affected by brain injury. Check it out on YouTube by searching "Opportunity Project."

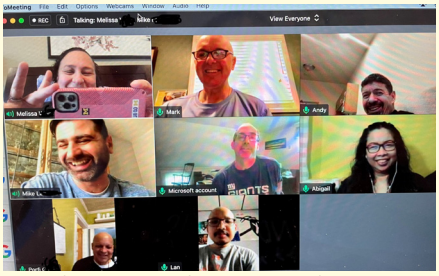
The Opportunity Project Member Committee (OPMC) prides itself on being a powerful advocate for Members and all adults with brain injury. Committee Members have been instrumental in assisting with developing OP's strategic plan, creating and implementing Member satisfaction surveys and suggestions plus managing Amazon's OP Charity Wish List.

Scan this QR code to donate from our Wish List:

In addition, our Member-led Technical Support team continues to provide fellow Members with technology support to maximize participation in OP's virtual services.



Member Jesse co-leads a group on assistive technology.



Feeling connected means everything to us!

2021 OP's YEAR-END APPEAL

Your support has made an everlasting difference.

Please consider a tax-deductible gift by December 31st.

Mail your gift in the enclosed envelope or visit www.opportunityproject.org/donate

jlondon@opportunityproject.org

Thank you!

SPECIAL REPORT

Opportunity Project Thrives During the Pandemic, Enhancing Programs for Individuals with Brain Injury

After COVID-19 redefined "typical" for everyone, Opportunity Project staff and leadership seamlessly transitioned the Clubhouse programs and services into a successful, fully functioning remote program with expanded evening and weekend sessions.

Post Pandemic Hybrid Model

OP welcomed new Members and participation levels have increased through virtual programs and the elimination of long-standing barriers such as transportation and time commitments.

OP has begun the transition to a hybrid model to include both remote and on-site programs, offering Members more flexibility and maximum support, plus enabling Members to cultivate new ways to interact.

iPads and laptops were purchased and smart TVs, an HEPA filtration/UV germicidal light air purification systems and contact free equipment were installed.

With these enhancements Opportunity Project is well positioned to continue to maximize the reach of their unique programs and services for survivors of brain injury.

Opportunity Project's Recent Accomplishments

- The OP Member-Led Technology Support Team was created to offer Members digital support and maximize participation.
- A closed Member Facebook page was formed offering "Facebook Live" sessions, interactive groups and program information.
- Yoga and Music Therapy instructors were added.
- A Speech-Language Pathologist and a second Occupational Therapist were hired.
- Various crucial, newly added Mental Health Programs were implemented – see reverse side for details.
- Opportunity Project's new YouTube channel was launched.
- The Amazon Clubhouse Charity Wish List was created, providing OP with essential Clubhouse items.
- The Annual Golf Classic 2020 was a huge success, raising $235,000 and the recent Brain Injury Awareness Month was the most promising yet, generating significant funds and awareness for brain injury.
- Opportunity Project was awarded various grants including an NJEDA grant for staff salaries and overhead costs as well as a significant grant from the Health Care Foundation of New Jersey for a state of the art air purification system and contactless equipment for the Clubhouse.

We re-opened the Clubhouse doors to welcome back Members in-person on August 2nd, 2021!









OP Program Spotlight: New Mental Health Programs

Our mental health plays an important role in helping strengthen our ability to cope with stress and adversity. These components are essential for personal well-being, family and interpersonal relationships and meaningful participation in society. Social support, coping skills, self-care, and self-esteem have a powerful impact on lessening the incidence of mental disorders and stress-related illnesses, especially critical for our Members during this past year of isolation.

We proudly highlight various recently added mental health support programs as part of OP's Cognitive & Community Integration Unit's robust offerings, including:

- **Mental Health Mondays Group** – Members discuss mental health stigmas, integrative holistic self-care, recovery approaches and building strong emotional balances to manage stress, challenges and trauma.
- **Grief Counseling Group** – Brain injury often brings about drastic life changes and loss in all aspects of life for survivors and their families and friends. Members work on developing coping strategies.
- **OP Peer-to-Peer Resilience Squad/Facebook Mentorship Programs** – Members who are on their road to recovery share their experiences with other Members to help reduce feelings of isolation and to promote hope and empowerment.
- **Mentor of the Month** – Each month an OP Member is acknowledged for being a positive role model and demonstrating outstanding support to other Members in need of motivation and encouragement.



Opportunity Project continues to help me and other Members mentor each other, co-lead therapy groups and engage with the community. - ***Mike***



Thanks OP family for helping me with self-care and strategies to cope with life's challenges. - ***Erica***



At OP, we feel empowered and appreciated when helping our peers. - ***Mike & Stanope***



At Opportunity Project, I'm given hope and support and I've gained my confidence back. - ***Abi***

We extend our deepest appreciation to our Members, Staff and Trustees as well as all of our supporters for helping Opportunity Project flourish during this past year!