

From the Desk of the CEO



It is my sincere hope that everyone in the Life-Skills, Inc. community has been and continues to be safe and well. The COVID-19 Pandemic has

imposed new, challenging, and some unwelcomed changes. The shelter-in-place order that was imposed in the later part of March had made it impossible for relatives to meet with sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and often made it impossible for staff to return to work.

However, for those of you who cannot visit loved ones, I want you to know that we have put protocols in place that will minimize their risk of exposure to the virus. Our staff have access to full Personal Protective Equipment, and our houses and vehicles are sanitized regularly so that we minimize the chances of infection. The Department of Developmental Services, in collaboration with the Fallon

Health Organization, has developed pop-up sites where individuals and staff can be tested for Covid-19. These pop-up mobile units have also visited individual group homes in order to administer testing.

We have been extremely fortunate that our precautions have limited the number of individuals and staff who have tested positive. Our staff have been vigilant, and if they had displayed symptoms, and were tested positive, they did the right thing; they self-quarantined.

Life-Skills, Inc. also set up two COVID-19 Alternative Care Sites in north and south central for the purposes of isolating our residentially served individuals who had contracted COVID-19 and required quarantining and isolation from their house mates. When an individual had tested positive for COVID-19, we had quickly taken them to one of these programs that had been approved by the local Department of Health as an isolation unit. Both of these programs were equipped with fully functional kitchens,

rooms with comfortable beds, showers, and full restroom facilities. While individuals were in the program, they were staffed 24/7 and were provided with opportunities for walks, exercise, and remote learning opportunities.

In the meantime, the staff at the home where the individual resides completely disinfected and sanitized the home and the individual's room, washed the individuals clothing, and regularly monitored the temperatures of everyone in the home including the staff.

The difficulties of relocating, working from home, and overcoming the fears and stressors relating to the pandemic is a challenge. However, the Life-Skills, Inc. staff have met the challenges with an unwavering spirit of determination.

For the past three months, everyone has worked to ensure that Personal Protective Equipment is available for everyone. We have also been the fortunate recipients of donations of goggles, masks,

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sanitizer, and face shields from individuals and companies in MA.

Our maintenance department continues to work in the programs to keep everything running smoothly and fully operational.

The management of all the information on protection, safe practices, and the various departments of health has required a Herculean effort. I want to thank each and every one of you for all of your hard work!

Without everyone working as a dedicated team, tirelessly confronting issues and crises, we would not have been able to make the safe, informed decisions that have led to competent action plans that have maximized our ability to keep everyone as safe as possible. Personal accountability has been key to keeping everyone safe and

maintaining a positive and healthy environment in our residential homes.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Cathy Hurstak on her new position as Director of Residential Services at Life-Skills, Inc. Cathy has worked as a member of the LSI team for many years. She started her career with us as a Program Manager, moved to Residential Coordinator in South Valley, and from there to North Central Residential Director. In every position, she has excelled. She brings excellent personnel management skills and a deep concern and regard for the quality of care provided in all of our residential homes.

In combining the north and south residential services, we will be ensuring that everything that is a hallmark of them will be consistent across our entire network.

I hope that everyone will take

the opportunity to welcome and support Cathy as she brings us to another level in service provision.

As we continue to move forward, it will be our accountability, strength of purpose, and resiliency that will carry us into the "New Normal" that looms in front of us. Re-opening is happening, parents are able to meet with their sons and daughters, albeit at the prescribed social distance, but things are moving forward.

Please keep in mind that as we move into this new uncharted territory, we will not have all of the answers. Be patient with one another and we can create a more resilient Life-Skills, Inc., one that will truly live up to our goal of "Building a Brighter Future" - for you, for our individuals, and for your families.

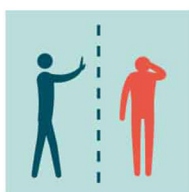


Tom Amick, CEO

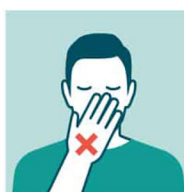
COVID-19 PREVENTION



WASH HANDS
AT LEAST 20 SECONDS



AVOID CONTACT
WITH SICK PEOPLE



DON'T TOUCH EYES,
NOSE OR MOUTH WITH
UNWASHED HANDS



AVOID
CROWDED PLACES



DO NOT SHARE
EATING UTENSILS
AND FOOD



AVOID TRAVELLING TO
AFFECTED AREAS
UNLESS NECESSARY



IF YOU BECOME SICK
SEEK MEDICAL CARE
IMMEDIATELY

Submit content to be
featured in
future newsletters!
tlewandowski@life-skillsinc.org

I don't have to point out that the events of the past few months have turned life upside down in ways that could have never been expected. We have been forced to take a hard look at our current workplaces, our classrooms, and the systems we count on to ensure that both quality of life and equality are protected. It is undeniable that our vision has been clouded on so many levels.

On the work front, the dust is settling and we are getting

a clearer picture of the faces of the workers who have kept us going. I am proud to see so many of the individuals that have participated in Employment Directions job programs out there, on the front lines. That being said, it is time to recognize the extent to which we have undervalued, monetarily and otherwise, their vital work.

It is my hope that these dark days will be the catalyst for overdue change. It is up to us to push for the changes

that ensure our workforce is diverse, respected, and paid a good living wage. We've made it through some tough months, now it is essential that we finish 2020 out with reflection, respect, and reform.

Thank you to all that have worked and sacrificed throughout these painful, teaching times.

Submitted by:
Kim Lapworth
Vocational Trainer
Employment Directions

most valuable players

MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS

January

Catherine Ackah – Brodeur Ave

February

Marriah Miller – Brodeur Ave

March

Tracy Pierce – Delaney Ave

April

Renee Boudreau - Winchendon

Carol Krasnecky – Delaney Ave

Stacey Krasnecky – Brodeur Ave

May

Amber Baillargeon - Delaney Ave

Bibianna Kagendo – Francis Ave

Jerry Oduro – McGovern Lane

June

Georgia Leaming - Delaney Ave



THANK YOU

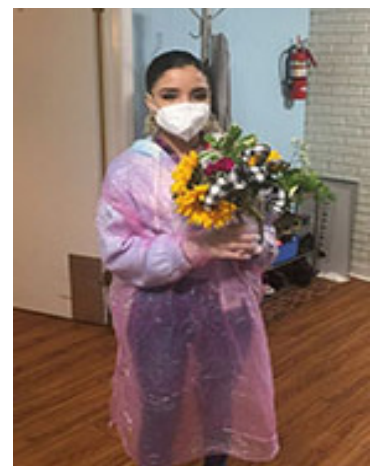
#inthistogether

We are incredibly grateful to all of the businesses and volunteers for donations of protective equipment, face shields, goggles, gloves, gowns, sewn masks, food,

flowers, and monetary donations to our agency.

Your contributions will help us continue our work, supporting the individuals

who rely on our services, and supporting our frontline essential staff working with our individuals during this pandemic on a daily basis.



Thank you to **Isador's Organics** and **The Gypsy Rose** in Oxford, MA for your thoughtful donations of floral arrangements to our south central residential programs. These colorful arrangements brightened up the day and the surroundings for our health care workers and residents! Thank you for your support!

www.isadors.com and www.flowersbythegypsyrose.com

#inthistgether



Thank you to FLEXcon for your generous donation of 50 face shields to help protect our staff and individuals we are caring for in our residential and in-home support programs!



We would like to thank **Patrick Flynn & Medway High Unicef Club, JK Auto Designs, Kids Clothes Club,** and the **Makery** for the following donations of face shields, cloth & surgical masks, coveralls, & protective glasses!

Thank you all for your generous donations of these much needed equipment and supplies!

H.E.L.P., the Masonic hospital equipment loan program, is run entirely by volunteers from the Massachusetts Free Masons, and they loan out reusable durable medical equipment. The Masons recently loaned hospital beds to Life-Skills, Inc. to use in their COVID-19 isolation locations. We are grateful to receive this equipment, and we look forward to continuing our relationship throughout this COVID-19 crisis.

Thank you **Brian Cavanaugh, President of SMD-HELP**, your Mason volunteers, and thank you to **Sean Morgan** for volunteering your time to pick up and deliver this equipment for Life-Skills, Inc.



Thank you **Denise DiGrigoli, Karin Tanenbaum,** and thank you **Goggles for Docs** for your donation of 200 goggles to Life-Skills, Inc!

Goggles For Docs is a way for the ski world to give to the Health Care Workers on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis.

Thank you for being part of the solution!



#inthistgether



WE LOVE OUR GROUP HOME STAFF!
What better way to show it than with PIZZA?!



More than 50 families and supporters have given over \$2,300 in Domino's pizza gift cards to group homes across Massachusetts, and we want to keep spreading the love and showing gratitude to the extraordinary essential workers who are taking care of citizens with intellectual disabilities in group homes.

Here's what staff have told us:

"It was a great surprise and the staff were so excited!!"

"Thank you again for all you are doing for so many people- it is AWESOME!!!"

"Your donation will benefit 2 of our homes where folks have been affected by COVID-19. You are helping us fulfill our mission to make lives better!"

**WE NEED MORE DONATIONS OF E-GIFTS CARDS
RIGHT NOW!**

Simply go to:

www.grouphomepizza.com

**and help us continue to show staff
how much they mean to us!**



Life-Skills, Inc. is a participating agency in the **Group Home Pizza Program**.

This program was created by two moms (partnering with Domino's Pizza) who wanted to show appreciation and acknowledgment to direct care staff at group homes by sending gift certificates for meals for staff and residents. Direct care staff are working overtime during this crisis, and this meal program gives them a break in preparing a meal and gives residents a fun treat!

Visit: <http://grouphomepizza.com> for more information on this program and to order an e-gift card!

Thank you **Cheryl Ryan Chan** and **Aniko Houlihan Baglaneas Eves** for such a thoughtful idea!





**VOLUNTEER FACE MASK
WORKING GROUP**

**Pam Cherkas & Laura Evonne
Steinman - Coordinators**

Thank you for your donation of 200
sewn face masks

WE'RE DOING
MORE WITH YOUR
SUPPORT

Thank you
***** FOR YOUR *****
DONATION

DONORS:

- * **Stephanie De Abreu**
- * **Wanda Merced**
- * **Patrick Morrison**
- * **Janice Smith**

DONATIONS NEEDED
Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)



Life-Skills, Inc. continues to operate our residential and in-home support programs to individuals throughout Central Massachusetts.

Staff in our programs are using supplies conservatively and appropriately, but due to the public health emergency, we have increased precautionary measures and increased the Personal Protective Equipment used to continue to ensure the protection and safety of our individuals and staff.

Due to the demand, we are requesting donations of the following items:

- * Vinyl gloves
- * Gowns
- * Masks
- * Eye protection/Goggles
- * Antiseptic wipes
- * Disinfectant wipes
- * Temporal thermometers

For info on donating, please email us at:
info@life-skillsinc.org.



ALTERNATIVE SITE CARE STAFF RECOGNITION

In late March, Life-Skills, Inc. began to set up two COVID-19 Alternative Care Sites for the purposes of isolating our residentially served individuals who had contracted COVID-19 and required quarantining and isolation from their house mates. We served individuals who had been hospitalized and required further isolation, or who were not hospitalized but tested positive for COVID-19 and had mild symptoms.

All individuals recovered,

tested negative before leaving, and returned to their residences in Gardner, Dudley, and Southbridge.

South Central Alternative Care Site

Four individuals were cared for at the south central isolation site.

To the South Central Residential Nurses:

Thank you, **Polly Burlingame** and **Aimee DeFalco**, for your help in setting up the site and caring so much for our

individual's health and well-being for the entire time the site was open.

To our residential staff in the South Central area:

Thank you to all the direct care front line workers from Mason, Arland, McGovern and FRS. Without your help for over 2 months, none of this could have been done. Your willingness to learn new skills, help each other and keep our individuals safe was admirable. Your individuals required a lot of care and supervision and you succeeded in helping them in so many ways.

The following staff worked directly at the site:

Arland:

Ignatius Mbach
Victor Kudedzi
Peggy Currier
Aidan Shevory
Carl Almonor
Sandro Bataille

McGovern:

Ashley Rincon

Mason:

Casey Bourque
Shalainna Humphrey
Amanda Fleck
Cecilia Sarkodee

Day Hab Staff:

Stephanie Penniman (FRS)
Jennifer Durfee (FRS)
Henry Giathi (MSDH)

To Our Residential Director and South Central Residential Coordinators:

Thank you Cathy Hurstak,
Joe Desrosiers, and Lori

#inthistogether

(Alternative Care Site continued...)

Szostakowski, for your excellent crisis work that supported this site's success. Your willingness and ability to react and respond to every demand that arose either at the site or one of the group homes was amazing. Nancy would have been so proud of all of your efforts.

To our Media Coordinator:

Thank you Tammy Lewandowski, who responded so quickly to the need for PPE donations of masks, goggles and face shields in the early days of setting up the isolation programs. We were ready thanks to these highly valued PPE donations that kept our staff and individuals safe

when supplies were limited.

North Central Alternative Care Site

Two individuals were cared for in the north central alternative care site.

To the North Central direct care front line workers:

Ann Audet
Misty Collins
John Dugay
Joseph England
Daniel Hammond
Leigha Matteson

Thank you for your excellent care of the individuals and the upkeep of the site. Both gentlemen recovered fully and happily returned back to their homes. Your

attention to detail and willingness to work at this site is well respected.

To the North Central Residential Management:

Thank you to Teresa Mejia, Angela Ithier, and Leigha Matteson for coordinating and supervising the care of the individuals at this site while balancing the needs of the residents in your group homes. You have a lot to be proud of.

Special thanks to Charmaine Johnson and Rhianna Curotto for your patience, understanding, and assistance.

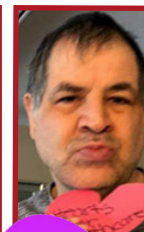
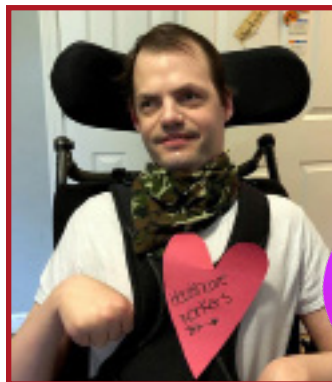
Submitted by:
Lisa Morgan
Director of Compliance

Hearts for our Healthcare Workers

A fun and meaningful project some of our individuals and staff have been working on is "Hearts for Healthcare Workers". This is a fun and meaningful way to show our support and gratitude for health care heroes (including our own) who are on the front line of this COVID-19 pandemic.

Help us to recognize our front-line workers by sharing your heart and a message of hope and appreciation on your window, on your door, or on your mailbox.

Thank you to our healthcare workers and first responders for all that you do!



Thank You

#inthistogether



Our individuals at Leominster program have enjoyed good health during this difficult and challenging time for everybody. We have all taken the necessary precautions and guidelines provided to us in order to keep everyone safe. It is a blessing that no one in our program has tested positive for Covid-19.

Guardians have been notified about every single step we have taken to keep their loved ones safe. Some of the guardians have shown their gratitude by doing volunteer jobs for our program. For example, Stephen's father offered to paint our shed. He came with his grandson and brought all of the materials needed, and they worked half of the day to make our house look shiny. We offered them iced tea and ice cream.

At the beginning of the pandemic, one of our individuals was missing the routine of waiting for the

bus in the morning to go to the day hab program, and it made him a little upset because he did not understand what was going on. To make him feel more comfortable, staff began to take him for a 10 to 15 minute ride around the town to get some fresh air. After arriving back home, he was much calmer.

Throughout this time, our individuals have been busy doing craft activities and doing exercise routines including dancing. Staff have taken them to local farms, parks, water reservoirs and also to get coffee by drive thru.

For our crafting projects, we made thank you signs to show our appreciation to our heroes in the front line saving lives. Each individual also decorated a quarantine T-shirt by doing hand printing on the shirt as a sign of appreciation. We also wrote the word "thanks" in small stones to decorate our garden.



We celebrated KB and GW's birthday's while social distancing.

Our staff, and the staff we have from day program have been doing an excellent job keeping our individuals safe, healthy and

happy. I feel very fortunate to have good people working in my program. We will continue working hard to maintain the safety of our program and our individuals!

Submitted by:
Maria Tineo
Residential Manager



gratitude
grat·i·tude | a feeling of appreciation or thanks

Greetings to all safely tucked away at home as are we.

As Program Manager, I would like to express my immense gratitude to the team at Brodeur Avenue:

Patty, Marriah, Gail, Brittany, Margaret, Catherine, Stacey and Deborah have shown their ongoing dedication every day to Jody, Celia, and Jenny during this unprecedented time in our lives. Always with a smile and a kind word, these ladies have assisted our individual's in adjusting to our "temporary new normal".

We are truly blessed at Brodeur Avenue to have such a dedicated team.

Sincerely,
Diane Mioduszewski
Program Manager

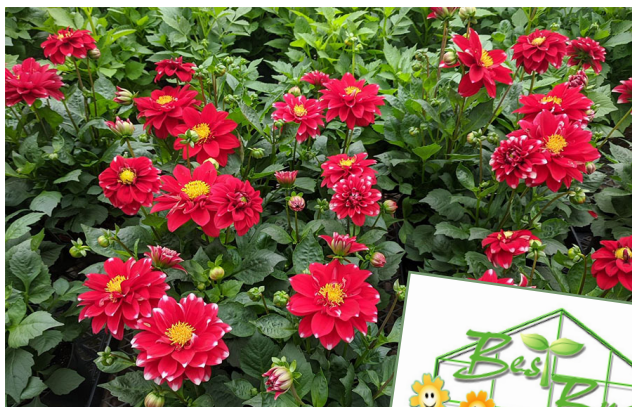
horticultural therapy



Life-Skills, Inc. Best Buds Greenhouse was developed in 2010 to provide horticulture therapy experiences to the day program participants in Webster. For years, the greenhouse has provided opportunities for many individuals (and staff) to improve their physical and mental health.

Planting, caring for and selling a variety of flowers and vegetables has encouraged skill development areas such as, fine motor, range of motion, physical strength, socialization and financial skills. Gardening also relieves stress and anxiety, improves mood, boosts self-esteem and prolongs attention span.

Like most things this year, 2020 was an interesting one for the Best Buds Greenhouse! Unfortunately, the plant plugs that were ordered arrived only a few days after the day programs had to temporarily close due to COVID-19.



A few employees assisted in planting the plugs, watering, fertilizing and maintaining these plants during growth, which was a learning process for all! In years past, program participants would grow a great variety of vegetables and flowers from seed as well. Unfortunately, this year that was not possible, and therefore the selection of vegetable/flowers/herbs was limited.

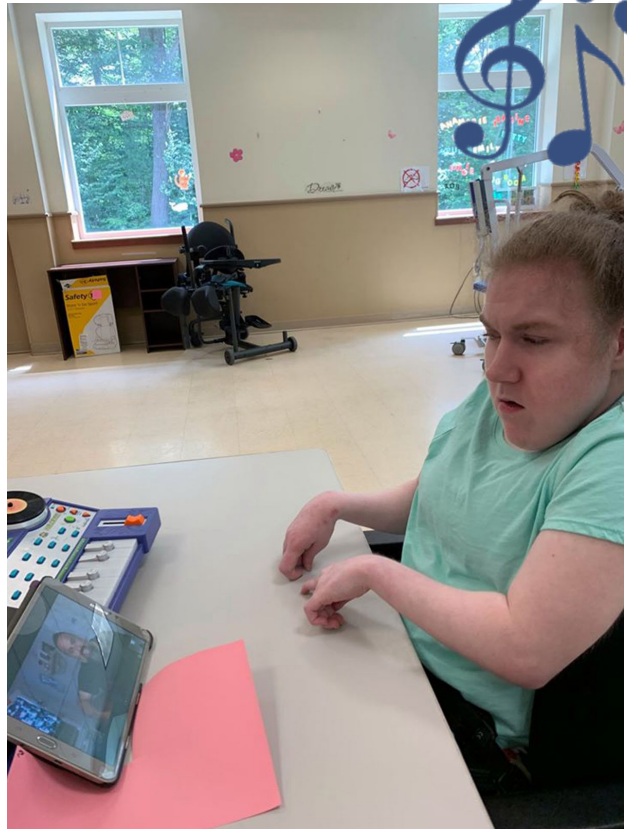
This year, rather than selling the majority of the plants at Closet Classics (due to COVID-19 closure), sales were done through pre-planned appointments at the greenhouse as well as a 2-day "drive through" plant sale at the FRS day program in Dudley, MA. CDC guidelines (social distancing & wearing masks) were followed in all situations.

We are so grateful for the support of the many community members, parents/guardians, and Life-Skills, Inc. employees who even during these challenging times, purchased plants to help support the day programs. Additional plants that were not sold this year were distributed among the local Life-Skills, Inc. residences to be added to their vegetable and flower gardens.

Although the smiles, laughter and camaraderie which typically can be seen amongst those working in the greenhouse was definitely missing this year, we are hopeful that 2021 will be the best year for Best Buds Greenhouse yet!

Submitted by: Ivy Wetherell, Behavior Specialist

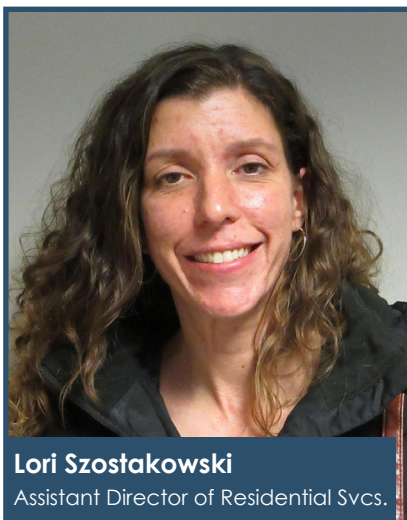
#inthistogether



Virtual Sessions: Emily, from our Greenfield Day Hab program enjoyed a fun Zoom drum circle session with **Mike Leo Drum Circles and Unique Rhythm-Based Programs.**

#musictherapy #drumcircle #stayconnected

Congratulations!
ON YOUR
PROMOTION



Lori Szostakowski
Assistant Director of Residential Svcs.

I am happy to announce that Lori Szostakowski has been promoted to Assistant Director of Residential Services.

Lori has been an integral part of South Valley residential programs for many years and our North Central homes will certainly benefit from her knowledge, hard work and dedication.

Lori rises to every challenge and I am certain her work will be invaluable with the challenges that lie ahead.

Cathy Hurstak
Director of Residential Services



In Memory



Nancy Marlborough was unparalleled in the way she served the individuals in Life-Skills, Inc. residential homes. Her mission was to provide the best life for everyone, in a manner that was individualized and personalized. Her care and concern was sincere, passionate and unwavering. I had the privilege of working for Nancy for many years. She was an outstanding mentor. She commanded the respect of those who worked for her, with her, from other agencies, DDS, and community providers, by the way she championed those she served.

When you got to know Nancy, you realized that she was naturally shy and reserved, and had a great love of family, friends, and animals. She cared for everyone with the same compassion she demonstrated at work. She had a knack for knowing just what someone needed – often before you knew you needed it. A card, a candy bar, a shoulder to lean on...

To say Nancy is missed is more than an understatement. There is a void that will remain unfilled. Her legacy will go on, as Joe Desrosiers put it so well one day, "I will think of what Nancy would do" when a tough decision needs to be made. To honor her is to continue the

mission of doing the best we can for those we serve. I was blessed to have worked with Nancy, but the greater blessing was that she was my friend. ~ **Cathy Hurstak, Director of Residential Services**

Nancy Marlborough worked for Life-Skills, Inc. for 30 years. In October 2019, she celebrated that anniversary at the annual Employee Milestone banquet; highlighted by a spontaneous standing ovation. Thank God she had



the pleasure of experiencing that expression of respect and love that we will always have for her. Her contributions to the development of group home, supported and independent living, was beyond compare. She was a legend in the advancement of services to developmentally disabled adults in the community.

It was so soon after her passing that we embarked on a crisis response to the Covid-19 pandemic. While there was not enough time to mourn the loss of her presence, guidance, advice and wisdom, we inherently knew that the best way to honor her dedication and devotion to all the individuals she served was to work as hard as we could to keep every individual and employee safe. We hope we made you proud and we will dedicate each and every day going forward to you. This world, this agency, and each of us is a better person because of knowing and working with you.

You are missed very much.

~ **Lisa Morgan, Director of Compliance**

Nancy was there for me on my first day of employment to train me to work at the Grenada Street program. I noticed Nancy's interactions with the individuals, and her genuine care and compassion towards them. I remember being inspired by her on that day. As the years went by, Nancy became my mentor, and guided me throughout my career. There aren't many words that can truly express what she means to me. She is missed by me, and so many others. ~ **Lori Szostakowski, South Central Residential Coordinator**

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." - Gandhi



building brighter futures
since 1970

44 Morris Street
Webster, MA 01570



Thank you for supporting our initiative to **Go Green**. Subscribe to our Portraits of Progress email newsletter and get updates on our agency delivered straight to your inbox!

<https://life-skillsinc.org/newsletters>