

BCL CONSUMERS EARN MEDALS AT THE 2017 SPECIAL OLYMPICS!

Two Inspiring Ladies Share Their Stories of Passion and Dedication to Achieving Goals

Meet Ashley, 25 years old, driven, enthusiastic, and one of the most caring young ladies you'll meet at BCL. Recognize her? It's because she's the friendly face greeting people at the 5 Ventura Drive front desk.



"I've worked here for about three years now. I've always done reception work," Ashley says, who notes that when she first started, she offered to help with anything that was needed. "I was doing basic phone calls, shredding, whatever they needed help with in the office."

Ashley, who lives in Dartmouth, is full of energy and life. When she's not enjoying her work at BCL, or at her second job over at Anytime Fitness, she loves going out with her staff, hitting up the beach, and listening to music. Her favorite? Rap! Ashley's lucky too. She enjoys every chance she has to visit her family in East Wareham. "I like to visit my parents as they're getting a little bit older," she says.

Ashley has resided within a BCL home for several years, and enjoys living with her current roommate. "We pretty much get along good together. We go out and we do things on the weekends. I like to be more active, and like them fitting me with someone else that's perfect to get along with."

While Ashley has countless admirable traits, perhaps her most recent inspiring moment was her 'win' at this year's Special Olympics. She says she's always been kind of active, enjoying going for walks and sports. "I love to play basketball," she adds, "And I'm a big Patriots fan." **See 'Ashley' continued on page 2...**

Meet Sarah, 31 years old, dedicated, responsible, soft-spoken, genuine, warm, loving, happy... Her list of amazing qualities goes on!

Sarah has worked for two years over at the front desk of BCL's 5 Ventura Drive office. When asked what her work is like, she responds, "I just love it." It's clear Sarah is very good at her job. She manages numerous tasks all at once, from answering phone calls to letting in visitors, filing papers, and assisting the staff with their various projects. She even helps with the Human Rights Trainings with Marina. "I help her with the training for the staff... I just love it," Sarah remarks.

However, what stands out most is her ear-to-ear smile that lights up the room when anyone walks in. A visitor, coming back on a return visit to BCL, was immediately recognized by Sarah who said, "Oh! You're back!" to which she quickly made small talk with him.



Outside of her work at BCL, Sarah's had big goals and ambitions to excel in another arena - the Special Olympics. "I've been doing it for a couple years now. I like the running," Sarah says. Discussing this year's Special Olympics, she modestly adds, "I did track and field and actually did good. I got two medals."

That's right! Sarah was awarded with two medals in this year's Special Olympics, earning Bronze and Gold medals in the shotput and turbo javelin competitions." While showing admiration for her medal accomplishments, Sarah amazes with, "I've had a couple!" **See 'Sarah' continued on page 2...**

Will you make a donation to help support our critical work?

Generous donors like you are the key to our success and make it possible for BCL to provide local individuals and families in need with assistance and critical services. We hope that we can count on your support and thank you in advance. You may donate online mail a check to our office payable to: Better Community Living, Inc. Any donation is appreciated and will be used toward the betterment of our services and programs.

'Ashley' continued...

"I never thought I'd do the Special Olympics," Ashley says, "but I put myself to a challenge and I got two bronze medals. One was for the javelin throw and one for the shotput throw." Not only did Ashley love competing, she loved the entire experience.

"We stayed at Boston University, at a dorm room, and we went to a restaurant and had chicken. Then the busses would shuttle us to Harvard University where the Special Olympics were held. And actually, my staff took me, and me and my staff had a good time."

Staying with her staff chaperone, Aisha, Ashley says, "She helped me and supported me through everything, through the whole thing... and she cheered me on when I was throwing." Ashley also enjoyed seeing a couple of her friends from other local agencies.

When asked where the idea to compete came from, Ashley said, "It came from my heart. I'm a very caring person. When I decide to do something, I strive to do it." And of course, when she heard her name called, she was overjoyed. "I felt very happy, excited that I got two bronze medals... "I told everybody!"

Ashley loves interacting with people, and says she hopes that someday she'll find a job in the mall in retail work. She's also constantly excited about her future. "My life goal is to live with my staff doing the program that they have, Shared Living."

Ashley describes herself as this. "I push myself beyond limits. That's what I do.

Until then, however, Ashley enjoys her life and loves the opportunity she's been given to work for BCL. "I care for a lot of people at BCL. It's been good. I've been able to get along with everybody here. I've been here for three years and absolutely love it. When I earn my money, I spend it wisely. I don't spend on foolish things. I save up for things I want," she says.

"I do whatever it takes," Ashley adds. "I work the front desk, and I do the Children's Program with Cathy Tremblay. All the children that I work with are very nice to me. I help them out. Whatever Cathy needs me to do. I'm in the BCL day hab every month.... BCL got me this job, so I thank all the people here who have gotten me strong. I consider them all like family to me. They keep me on my feet."

'Sarah' continued...

Success comes from hard work though. There's training involved, Sarah says. "We usually practice at UMass Dartmouth with our coach Jenna. She's very nice. We practice every Sunday through the summer." When asked if she'll keep competing, Sarah says she will. It's a lot of hard work and practice, she says adding, "I just love it."

Sarah also talked about enjoying the experience, like staying at Boston University and being away for the entire weekend. "The last two years, we've been going to a chicken place in Boston." (Someone else once mentioned this chicken too!)

When Sarah isn't working at BCL, or training to win Gold medals, she lives in New Bedford with a roommate. "She's very nice and friendly," Sarah says, "I've been there just about a year." She also has another job over at Anytime Fitness. "I clean. I love it. People are friendly. The lady I work for, Michaela, is so friendly," Sarah says.

In her spare time, Sarah loves shopping and "just getting out," as she puts it. She also loves listening to music, noting that NSYNC is what's playing on her Pandora right now. Oh, and she also likes history. "I went to King Richard's Faire with my roommate, and my manager and my staff. I loved it," she says.

Sarah adds, "I wouldn't be able to do it without my manager. Her name is Anita Coelho. We're really close. She helps me with everything, managing my money, appointments. We've become good friends too."

When asking Sarah to describe herself, the answer is no surprise after talking with her. "I'm a friendly person," she says. "It's just a natural quality." Sarah hugs friends, even brand new ones, who visit BCL and greets everyone with a smile. Her joy, enthusiasm, and commitment to her goals is inspiring, and she can't thank BCL enough for all its support.



Highlights

A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Thomas C. Riley, M.P.A.
Executive Director

It has been a successful, praiseworthy and an exciting 2017 to date. I am thrilled to report that over \$33,000.00 was raised through eight successful fundraising events which were held throughout the spring, summer and fall.

Better Community Living, Inc. (BCL) is very fortunate to have such dedicated, supportive community partners and a staff that is second to none. Your continued commitment is valued and appreciated. Without you, BCL could not be so successful. As the holiday season descends on us and with Thanksgiving being only weeks away, it is with the utmost gratefulness I say thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Looking forward, in 2018 BCL will be celebrating its 30th anniversary as a premier human service agency and is planning special events to commemorate this important milestone. Together we can continue to make a difference and fulfill our mission of supporting and serving individuals with developmental disabilities in the Greater New Bedford area as they strive to develop relationships and greater independence in the community.

On behalf of our Administrative Team and Board of Directors we wish you peace, prosperity, health and happiness this holiday season and during the year ahead.



L-R: March Awareness Walk; Winning Golf Team, Matt Adams, Wayne Bizarro, Brian Lovenbury, Rick Tremblay; Staff cooking class with GNBVT's Bob Wilkinson

FUNDRAISING & EVENTS

As part of our continued efforts to raise awareness and raise funds, we hosted several events for staff and the community. In the month of March, we honored National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month by hosting our first **Awareness Walk**, engaging the community, staff, and consumers. We also distributed educational bookmarks to all New Bedford libraries, and hosted several **dining fundraisers**. Over the course of several months, we hosted successful fundraisers with Ninety Nine Restaurant, Not Your Average Joe's, and Pasta House Italian Grille. In addition, BCL hosted its first ever **Wellness Fair**, engaging local vendors and supplying information on health and wellness to our staff and the general public. We also held our **18th Annual Golf Tournament**, which once again, produced a great turnout and was a wonderful event. In addition, BCL received funds from two brand new partnership events. This included a **Bike Run** and a **Poker Run**! Both of these events introduced BCL to new persons in the community, and helped raise critical funds for our programs. **Our Poker Run was even featured on ABC6 News!** In addition, BCL held another successful Sweet Temptations Wine & Food Event—our agency's largest annual fundraiser! Thank you to all of our sponsors and all who continue to attend our many events.

VISIBILITY

Nearly one year ago, BCL advanced on its goal to further expand the mission and visibility of the organization both online and in the community. Ashley Bendiksen, a local communications and marketing professional, was contracted to assist the agency in these efforts. Since partnering with BCL, Ashley has redeveloped and reignited our social media efforts on Facebook. This includes new graphics, video slideshows, spotlight articles on BCL programs, and various other posts to showcase the agency's hallmarks. She has also helped to redesign several brochures, and has been instrumental in helping to organize, strategize, and promote some of BCL's events, notably in the month of March for National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. Further, Executive Director Thomas Riley now films a recurring 'live video' series on the BCL Facebook page where he informs followers of updates and news. To date, **our Facebook following has increased by 100%!** In addition, BCL commissioned Cesar Cabral of Artisan Creative to build BCL a **brand new website!** If you have not yet looked, take a peek. Combined, our heightened social media and website will help to promote the agency, inform the community of our services, and solicit more online donations to support our programs. **Follow us on Facebook!**

Success Stories

BRIDGES TO FAITH: A STORY OF BELONGING

Bridges to Faith coordinator Heather Dextrateur, spoke at the Ruderman Foundation interfaith meeting at Northeastern University in Boston this June. The meeting informed attendees about resources and programs that support faith-based social inclusion. Joined by Heather was Sharon Costa, a participant of Bridges to Faith, whose moving story helped demonstrate the true impact of the program. When Heather met Sharon, she was living with a Shared Living Provider in Fall River. "There were two things Sharon wanted to be sure I knew. One, she was of Cape Verdean descent and two, she was a Christian." However, Sharon was attending a Portuguese Catholic Church with her caregiver on Sundays. "Although she was not Catholic, nor did she speak or understand Portuguese, she stated, 'it is better than nothing.' Sharon was hungry for God and wanted the experience of faith, God and church so much that she was willing to settle and attend a service she didn't understand and that was not her faith."



Heather immediately found a Faith Companion who began to help Sharon immerse more fully with her faith. Eventually, Sharon moved into a new Shared Living home in New Bedford, where she requested to start attending a church she was familiar with. She had attended a Bridges to Faith Christmas event there in the past, plus she recognized many of its members as Cape Verdean, even recalling some from her past when living with her parents. Sharon began to attend the new church and became friends with her new Faith Companion, Christina, who became the perfect resource for Sharon's interests. Christina was an active member of the church, was part of the choir, served as the church's event coordinator, and leader of its Woman's Group. Sharon was eager to participate in these activities, and not just attend Sunday service. First, Sharon started to attend Bible study every Thursday, and then she showed interest in the choir. "The church took their choir very seriously and only the most devoted church members were allowed to even audition," Heather says. "Sharon was DETERMINED. She asked if she could attend the practice as she knew that would be the only way she could learn the dances and the words to the songs. Christina picked up Sharon every Wednesday to attend choir practice. For six months, Sharon NEVER missed a practice. She practiced day and night until she became an official member of the choir." Sharon extended an invitation to all she knew, and packed the church to watch her sing on stage for the first time.

"Sharon now has a new family. It is not paid staff support, but people who embrace her for who she is. Sharon no longer has to say, 'I want you to know I am a Christian.' She has forever marked her identity, made her religious preferences known, paved her own way and she is a Christian."

WORKPLACE WELLNESS + EMPLOYEE LOSES 20LBS IN CHALLENGE!

One of the main focuses at BCL in 2017 has been on employee wellness. The agency received a grant in January to help support everything from preventing employee burnout to increasing overall physical and emotional health among staff. Daryl Lopes, Wellness Champion of the new BCL Wellness Committee, says the grant is highly beneficial to BCL employees. "There needs to be a wellness component to an employee's life to have success and reach many of the goals we set. You have to be mentally attuned and physically ready to care for individuals that can't always necessarily say what they need. That can make it hard and stressful." Following a successful Wellness Fair held in April, staff are also actively involved in a Wellness Competition, which uses a points-based system, paired with incentives and prizes for making healthy choices. "Staff earn points by tracking their fruits and vegetables, their water intake, by checking into the gym, for every 15 minutes of activity, for attending wellness meetings, and points for turning in their tracking sheet." Employees win prizes when they reach certain milestones, with large prizes available at the end of the challenge. In just its

second week, numerous staff had already reached their first tier goal. BCL has also hosted free cooking classes, a free Zumba class, and guidance on using the Fitness Pal app and keeping a weekly food journal.



"Healthier employees are happier employees. They're out less, and they take time off for vacation more than for sick days. We're hoping to have success with this program, make it sustainable, and make people aware of what they can do to improve their health. We're really hoping that employees will take notice of what we're doing. We notify them through our employee website, implemented email for all staff members to keep them in the loop, and hopefully soon we will have a Facebook page specifically for BCL wellness to get and keep them engaged."

Our Work

A WORD ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

Earlier this year, the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services issued a 'Position Paper on Social Inclusion.' The article emphasized that every effort should be made to ensure that persons with disabilities are *engaged* with the community, versus simply being "in" it. Reading this was a welcoming sentiment for organizations working within our industry, and it also made us feel very good about our agency. Here at BCL, we couldn't be more proud to say that we ARE doing this... In fact, we have always done this. The idea of "social inclusion" is at the core of our origins and at the heart of our mission. We have the word community right in our name. Community enrichment can be found across all of our services and programs - from our residential homes and Shared Living, to our ACCESS Dances, family and children's activities, and programs like our Supported Employment Network with the South Coast Chamber and our Bridges to Faith program. We partner with area events and groups, plan outings, and constantly create opportunities for integration, relationship-building, and growth. Better Community Living consistently strives to be a premier human service agency for those with disabilities. It is our daily goal to ensure that the persons we serve are fully engaged and able to reach their full potential.



- OUR PROGRAMS**
- Bridges to Faith
 - Children's Services
 - Day Habilitation
 - Individual Supports
 - Residential Living
 - Shared Living
 - Supported Employment

This is why we do what we do. This is why we host *fundraisers*. This is why we focus on the wellbeing of our hard-working staff. *Our priority is your loved one* and providing quality supports for all persons with disabilities in our community.

Give 'Quality of Life' this Holiday Season...

If you see the value in what we do, consider a donation. As the year nears its end, and we consider those who need help most, we ask that you make a small donation to support our consumers (like Ashley and Sarah) and the betterment of our programs like the ones you have read here. You may donate online at www.bettercommunity.com or make your check payable and mail to: Better Community Living, Inc. 5 Ventura Drive, No. Dartmouth, MA 02747.

