

HORIZONS



CROTCHED
MOUNTAIN

The magazine of Crotched Mountain Foundation

WINTER 2022

The Power of the Human Spirit



Artist: Marilyn Ham, a nurse at Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center in the 1950s.

The Creativity and Ingenuity of Impact

“Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions.” *Albert Einstein*

What does a world that works for everyone's abilities look like? I try to imagine our communities, our schools, our healthcare, our transportation, our recreation and sports, our shopping and our arts and culture -- all available and accessible to everyone. It is hard to imagine, but if the world is to change, then we must preview life by imagining it, as Einstein said. Our communities have been designed for the young and healthy, and not for those with disabilities, the sick, and the elderly. This is especially true during a crisis.



While the country was scrambling to serve the larger population during Covid, Crotoned Mountain was desperate to reach the 850 adult clients with disabilities that are extremely limited in mobility, poor, medically fragile, and most spread in the furthest corners of New Hampshire. How do we keep them alive while protecting the lives and safety of our staff? Well the answer is, we did everything possible. We kept in constant contact via thousands of calls per week, Zoom video, and of course face to face visits with masking. We ensured that life saving, essential services were provided. Every day has been different and exhausting, but, for sure, many lives were saved.

For kids with disabilities, we had to imagine a different path. Over the past year, we have seen that the educational system that was under-serving kids with disabilities prior to Covid simply didn't have the resources nor the answers for them when the pandemic struck. These kids that were having the most difficulty in school, had an even harder time, and many slipped backwards. For many, this was a life crisis, and, for others, it was a lost opportunity to achieve their potential amid isolation.

According to the United Nations, education is lifesaving, and is provided in the earliest phases of humanitarian responses around the world. When kids aren't in school, nutrition suffers, child abuse and violence increases, mental health issues increase, and, of course, education stalls. This is not theoretical, but documented time and again. We can accurately predict that this has happened to the children with disabilities in New Hampshire during our Covid crisis. This is why we created CMF Kids, so that we will be there in the poorest schools when we are needed.

So what does that mean in practice? It means we are there for our kids and adults with disabilities in the good times and especially in the bad times. They can rely on us to stand and help them, regardless of the emergency that they may be facing.

As supporters of Crotoned Mountain, you make this happen. Your compassion and unwavering dedication to our mission means the world to us. Thank you for standing with us as we navigated these churning waters in new and creative ways - all, of course, in service of our 100-year common charge: to empower children and adults with disabilities.

Ned Olney, President and CEO
Crotoned Mountain Foundation

Face of Philanthropy Changing Lives is Good for Business

Crotoned Mountain Foundation is grateful to the local businesses and organizations that have given so generously to make a true difference in the lives of our most vulnerable residents. To learn more about how you can become a champion for children and adults with disabilities please contact Kevin Harte, VP of Advancement at 603-669-0821 or kevin.harte@crotonedmountain.org.

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Facing Challenges, Arm in Arm

The pandemic has pushed Crotched Mountain's staff to think creatively and conjure new strategies to help keep their clients safe and successful.

Sometimes all it takes is a soft edge. That's what Keith, a case manager with Crotched Mountain Community Care (CMCC), learned from one of his clients when he heard what he was using for a slide-board. A slide-board helps a person transfer from a wheelchair to a bed or couch. Keith's client had been making due with a makeshift version: the middle leaf of a dining room table. A proper slide-board has a smooth, beveled edge to prevent gashes or injury (particularly grievous for a person who has no feeling in his legs; an unnoticed cut can quickly become a dangerous open wound). Through our special grant funding that is available to our clients, Keith purchased a proper slide-board, one with a safe, beveled edge and, well, Keith, take it away: "My client was so excited that he acted like he had found gold."

Such is the nature of independent case management, particularly at CMCC where staff work tirelessly to support their clients - all of whom are low income and have a disability or chronic illness. The Choices for Independence (CFI) Medicaid waiver funds these services. In normal times, this funding, along with life-changing grant support and the hard work of CMCC case managers, helps ensure that clients who otherwise may need to be in a nursing home can safely live in their own communities with their family and friends.

With the onset of the pandemic, however, the game changed and the stakes were raised.

But CMCC was up to the challenge.

"We're working in an environment that has never been seen before," said Diego, a CMCC case manager. "We are learning along with our clients."

"We became de facto therapists for a lot of people," says David, another case manager. "Our clients know that they aren't alone and they know they can talk to us. Some resources may not be as available, but at least they know we'd be there to talk to them and provide that emotional support."

Supply chain issues (especially with regards to medical devices and personal care equipment) and a shortage of direct care staff (mirroring all other industries currently) represent the lion's share of resource scarcity.

As Deb, a CMCC case manager says: "Just the shortage of regular, but essential, medical supplies very nearly caused one of my clients to be hospitalized. It would have been devastating, and very risky because of her compromised health."

This, in conjunction with limited face-to-face contact the pandemic has generated, has forced CMCC staff to become more industrious and creative in the way they help meet their clients' needs. And it all starts with each other.

"I have been a sounding board for my fellow case managers," said Nichole, a CMCC supervisor. "As colleagues, even though we're physically separated, we're all very connected."

"Every problem may not be solved, but you know you've brought everything to the table and have created a circle of support around someone. Sometimes that's enough."

For Sarah, another CMCC case manager, the interpersonal bonds often go beyond her coworkers and spread deep within the community.

"It's about developing relationships," she says. "We're working together to think of other resources and no one is saying 'that's not my problem.' Every problem may not be solved, but you know you've brought everything to the table and have created a circle of support around someone. Sometimes that's enough."

So how does a service that relies so much on face-to-face visitation adapt to circumstances that preclude that? In the land of CFI, the phone is king.

Though much of the world has depended on video conferencing, the vast majority of CMCC clients are unable to afford high-speed internet and video-capable devices. So that means the old-fashioned phone call takes precedence.

Of course, there are unforeseen challenges in everything.

Recounts Amanda, a CMCC case manager: "At the start of the pandemic, I received a new client and she didn't know who I was. She didn't trust phone numbers she didn't recognize and whenever I called I was asked to stop these scam calls and was hung up on. One day I was able to visit her safely and program my number into her contacts and now she knows it's just me."



CMCC Case Manager Dave Kutz visiting his client V.

"We are constantly thinking outside of the box and looking at problems from all different angles," Diego says. "I have always loved chatting with my colleagues and now it's even more important to rely on each other."

"Our case managers have delivered equipment, left everyday supplies on doorsteps, made thousands and thousands of calls every month, and have regularly worked with police to do wellness checks if we haven't been able to reach a client," says Kara Nickulas, Executive Director of Community Services. "These have been life-saving efforts, especially as our clients have been even more isolated in an effort to keep themselves safe during the pandemic."

As has been the case with so many others' experiences in the Covid era, the most powerful and healing salve for frayed emotions is the little thing, that small piece of normalcy that has been in such short supply for too many months.

"It's the small things that make a big difference," says Kara.

One small thing: some yarn and knitting needles, secured by Liz, a CMCC supervisor who accessed our special grant funding for a client who was isolated in her home.

"It is this charitable support from our supporters that helps with items not covered through insurance," she says. "My client likes to knit but didn't have the supplies. It wasn't a big purchase but it really helped her quality of life. For her, it was priceless."

And another small thing: the aforementioned beveled edge, which meant the world to Keith's client. That, in turn, meant the world to Keith.

"To my clients I say, 'I'm here to go arm and arm with you and face these challenges with you,'" he says. "Because we're in it together."

Your generosity and support gives CMCC case managers like Deb, David, Keith, Sarah, Liz and Diego and many more the strength to continue to make a difference in the lives of some of the most vulnerable adults with unique needs throughout New Hampshire.



Meet Dacia, (seated), a CMCC client who has Beals Syndrome, a connective tissue disorder. She also dealt with a severe bout of Covid in December 2020. Deb (right) is Dacia's step-mother as well as her PCSP (Personal Care Service Provider).

"Dacia needs a lot of help with self-care and routine household tasks, and her mobility and memory are very poor," says Marjorie, Dacia's CMCC case manager. "CMCC has gotten her funding to pay for a bed rail, which successfully prevents her from falling out of bed, something she was doing very frequently. We also used grant funding to get her a grab bar for her shower, and CFI funded a stair lift, so she can safely get up and down to her basement private living area."

This past Christmas, Dacia was able to achieve some welcome normalcy through her return to her beloved seasonal job as a bell ringer for The Salvation Army.

Hitting the Curveball

Crotched Mountain's day program for adults with disabilities represents yet another case study in adaptability and creativity.

The day program is designed to give adults with disabilities the opportunity to have rewarding, engaging experiences in the community. These can include volunteer activities, jobs, recreation and leisure, and exciting field trips and outings to special places

But Covid changed the game and forced staff to develop experiences that operated in the temporary new reality of social distance and offline establishments. So, creativity was the flavor of the era and direct support staff endeavored to create activities that were both satisfying and, most importantly, safe.

"We are constantly evolving and following all safety guidelines," said Dave Caron, Program Manager for the Crotched Mountain day program. "No matter what obstacles Covid provides, we are creatively coming up with solutions."

That means pinpointing low-traffic community areas like the local ministry center during off hours to have lunch or head to Crotched Mountain Ski and Ride for accessible recreation or seek out safe and socially distanced leisure at the local Y.

And it's the program staff that have made it all happen.

"They have been incredible," Dave says. "They're so dedicated, patient, and supportive, even through Covid spikes. They have a heart for service. I am incredibly proud."



Nichole and Dan



Ryan and Shawn



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Horizons Winter 2022

CMF Kids Kicks Off Round 2 of Partnership Program

We are excited to announce that Crotched Mountain Foundation will soon begin accepting applications to our next round of CMF Kids special education partnerships, following a successful and exciting first round (stay tuned for powerful stories of your impact coming soon). Committed to improving educational outcomes for children with complex disabilities, Crotched Mountain Foundation believes every student deserves the opportunity to succeed in school and in their own communities.



The continuation of our groundbreaking partnership program with New Hampshire's poorest school districts will further our shared mission to strengthen special education programs and improve educational outcomes for children with complex disabilities. Our priority focus areas are: inclusive education, family engagement in special education services, vocational training and employment, transition planning and services, teacher and paraprofessional training and development, and overall student achievement.

Learn more at cmfkids.org