

SUMMER 2022

THE BUZZ!

FOR ALL THINGS NEWSWORTHY AT WACOSA



WACOSA WORKS!

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MEET

SHELBY

Shelby started at WACOSA in 2012. At that time, as it is today, some of Shelby's goals were to increase independence and improve communication skills. Shelby, who is nonverbal, began working with a speech device, sign language, and communicating through gestures at the age of 2. Katie Case, WACOSA Case Manager, reflects, "Shelby has grown so much in the ten years he has been at WACOSA. The area of biggest improvement is his independence. Shelby really wants to do things for himself and is eager to work. He knows what his tasks are and would prefer it if you'd just get out of his way so he can get his job done! Shelby continues to shine and is just a happy person. It has been a joy to watch his personal growth."

Speaking of personal growth Shelby, in 2022, became a Special Olympic Gold Medalist competing in swimming events! Shelby represented Minnesota in the Special Olympics Games held in Orlando, Florida. Shelby won gold in the 50-meter freestyle,

gold in the 50-meter backstroke, and bronze in the 4X25 meter relay. Shelby, and his mother Lisa, also got to spend some time at Disney's Magical Kingdom and Animal Kingdom. "In this trip, his two worlds collided," Lisa shares, "His love for Disney and the Special Olympic Games came together in one Magical Trip!"

Independence, success, and communication can mean different things to different people. It can mean having a job and being able to do it on your own, it can mean using sign and gestures to say what you'd like to say, and it can mean crushing it at the Special Olympics and bringing home the gold. Gold medal or no gold medal, all of us at WACOSA are incredibly proud of Shelby's accomplishments.



PAPER MAKING

WITH KELLY MEYER

"It's ok, the pulp is a little slimy, but don't worry, we have towels to dry your hands off," Kelly Meyer, local artist, and instructor, tells the WACOSA group she is working with. Some people tentatively dip their fingers in the pulpy mixture, others plunge their hands and squeeze the satisfying pulp. Kelly is at WACOSA teaching about papermaking. The WACOSA students sit around the tables which are set up as their own art station as Kelly explains the process of paper making and encourages each artist to explore the art in ways that they are comfortable with. Some people want some support, others take off on their creation with little guidance, and everyone is enjoying themselves. In the end, each WACOSA artist will have created a sheet of paper with their own artistic touches.

Kelly works both with ISD 742 and Deafblind Services of MN as an Intervener. When asked why Kelly does what she does, she responds, "I love art and think

it's essential to the lives of all people because it gives meaning to our lives and helps us understand our world. Art helps us to develop and reinforce concepts, communicate with one another, develop choice making, and build confidence."

Sensory art, such as paper making, is the purposeful inclusion of non-visual senses in the art process, such as touch, sound, smell, and taste. At the WACOSA paper-making class, Kelly shows the group how to add items to their paper such as glitter (texture) and dried flowers (texture and scent). She shares you can add spices, essential oils, etc., there is no right or wrong as long as it's safe!

Kelly taught two paper-making classes at WACOSA, working with about 16 people.



To learn more about Kelly Meyer Art visit www.kellymeyerart.com

Kelly Meyer is a fiscal year 2022 recipient of a Creative Support for Individuals grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature; and by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

1ST AVENUE MURAL PROJECT

Art Education with Dan Mondloch

Thanks to the Central MN Art Board, WACOSA clients at the 1st Avenue program were recently given the opportunity to work with a local award-winning local artist, Dan Mondloch to create two murals. Over a 4-week period, Dan met with approximately 15 WACOSA artists with significant cognitive and physical disabilities, teaching different art techniques using adaptive tools and equipment in the medium of acrylic paints. Over several months, Dan sorted the paintings done by the clients, cut strips and images from them, and created two 3 X 5 murals that are stunning and now hanging at First Avenue.

Mike, a WACOSA client, typically did not join group activities. This art project helped Mike really come out of his shell. He found that he LOVES painting and was excited about Tuesdays and Wednesdays. He talked about different ideas he had for what he wanted to paint next. This project was life changing for Mike, who

now joins group activities because he made friends through this process and felt empowered. So many of the clients learned different painting techniques and improved their fine motor skills. The staff were able to learn different ways to engage the clients - one example is that a client couldn't move their arm to paint on the canvas so the staff moved the canvas for the client. They were so proud of their painting! All abilities can paint amazing artwork!



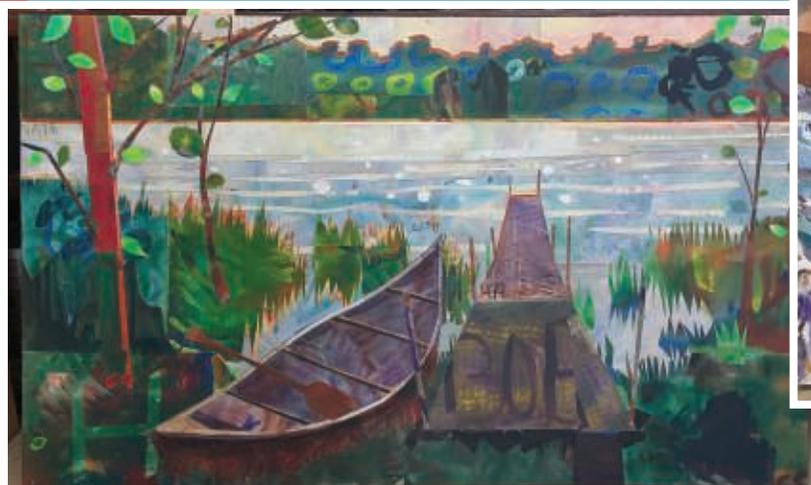
WACOSA RECEIVES LIFE ENRICHMENT AWARD

1st Avenue Mural Project Wins MOHR Life Enrichment Award

WACOSA received a Life Enrichment Award from the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR) for its innovative Art Mural project at 1st Avenue. The award is presented annually to MOHR members that demonstrate innovative ways of enriching the lives of individuals with barriers to daily living.

Pat Flicker, WACOSA Development Manager stated, "As I watched Dan Mondloch and Mike, (a WACOSA client), receive the MOHR award, the impact of this project became obvious to me. Mike beamed proudly

at his accomplishment, showing everyone the barn and the snowmobile that he painted and Dan incorporated into the mural." He stated, "I love painting now. I even have paints at home!"

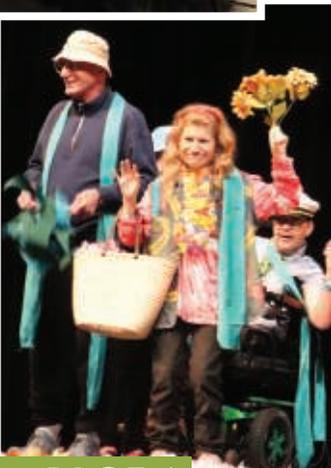


FILL THE CASTLE

A FANTASTICAL JAMBOREE

"Kate, my daughter was in One Act Plays in high school but never got the opportunity to be in the spotlight. She was always backstage. Kate finally got the chance to be on stage. She was the Queen in "Fill the Castle". Kate got to do something she never thought she would do, perform on stage. As a family, we have gone to many plays, "Fill the Castle" was the best one ever."

– Patti Fenda



It's the Queen's birthday, a joyous occasion. The King and Queen have invited the people of the North, South, East, and West to a jamboree at the castle, but not just any jamboree, this is a fantastical jamboree and contest to see who can fill the castle. With that task in mind, the WACOSA-produced play, Fill the Castle – A Fantastical Jamboree takes us on an entertaining journey to see what ideas the people of the kingdom come up with to please the queen, and fill the castle.

The journey to get to the castle was long but adventuresome. We had over 30 people from WACOSA programs working in all aspects of producing the play, with the help of WACOSA

staff, Mike Nichols, and two talented performers, Heather Mastromarco and Nicholas Pawlowski. (There were many volunteers, family, staff, and friends involved in the production. Thank you all!) We had actors, narrators, tech crews, ushers, greeters, and general supporters. We couldn't have asked for a better audience!

The real magic of this performance is not what the Queen got for her birthday, but the transformative experience for not only WACOSA clients, but for volunteers, staff, family, and the audience. WACOSA's Mike Nichols, the driving force behind the performance, says it best, "Looking at the faces of the performers you saw love, pride, and



a sense of feeling valued. This was a day that I will forever remember as one of the best days in many lives. I know I am not alone in that. The lesson that comes from this is with enough determination and ambition, any dream can come true."

long list of reasons not to. But then I saw how quickly (and joyfully) many people with disabilities did dance, and how they gave me permission to do the same."



Heather Mastromarco, the Director of the play, adds, "I loved that we were able to write our own script creating roles for each person to shine. Theatre is an excellent platform that helps us all build focus, improve memory, create new ideas, enhance communication skills, work on empathy, and build self-confidence. I am so grateful for this experience."

At the end of the day the Queen was pleased as all the people filled the castle with dance. But what we all saw was the castle was filled with joy, pride, confidence, and for many the opportunity for the first time to have their moment in the spotlight.



Nicholas Pawlowski, the Musical Director, & Choreographer concludes, "There was once a time when I wouldn't dance because I had a



"This performance was a prime example of how WACOSA changes lives. It was great for the performers and the audience. The play had lots of learning experiences and examples that they can learn from."

– Sue Lemke



This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Central MN Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

ARLENE PHILLIPS

My daughter Gail has been part of WACOSA for 14 years. We had tried multiple other providers in Minnesota, but it was clear that WACOSA was the best fit for Gail. WACOSA has changed Gail's life, she loves going there! Gail is flourishing and was even in a play this past summer.

When I turned 72 I learned that I needed to do a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from my IRA, which is taxable unless you donate it. With help from my

financial advisor, we did a tax-free Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to WACOSA. Using some of my RMD to support WACOSA was a wonderful way to donate and save money in the process.



BALANCE YOUR GIVING...

You have the ability to leave a mark on the causes closest to your heart, regardless of your occupation, estate size or income level.

Because life is unpredictable and the value of your assets may rise and fall, giving a percentage of your estate can have a bigger impact on WACOSA than you ever thought possible.

This is a giving solution that allows you to recognize more than one person or charity that has been important in your life. Gifts to loved ones and to organizations such as WACOSA also remain proportional—no matter how your estate fluctuates—and you can change your mind at any time.

*"We make a living by what we get.
We make a life by what we give."*

— Winston Churchill

Here are a few simple ways to make sure the people and causes you love are protected after your lifetime:

1. Leave WACOSA a percentage—from 1 to 100 percent—of the assets in your will or trust to support our work.
2. Leave WACOSA a percentage of your residual estate (the portion of your estate that remains after all gifts have been made and all claims of the estate are satisfied).
3. Name WACOSA as a beneficiary of a percentage of your life insurance policy or retirement plan account.
4. Designate WACOSA to benefit from all or a percentage of your remaining bank or brokerage account assets.

To request a copy of "Wills and Bequests", please contact Pat Flicker. pflicker@wacosa.org 320-257-5193

THANK YOU!

BENTON TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Can we be honest? Most people don't find trash compactors very interesting, or exciting, or something to celebrate. At WACOSA, specifically ThriftWorks!, it was all of those things.

Thanks to a grant from Benton Telecommunications Foundation and a major donor, WACOSA was able to install a trash compactor at our ThriftWorks! location. The trash compactor has provided a cleaner, safer and much more cost effective solution to the waste collected at WACOSA ThriftWorks!

"The reality is that thrift stores produce a lot of waste. We recycle all we can, but we still have a large quantity of items that need to be thrown away," says Kayla Goering, one of the two team leaders at ThriftWorks! "The compactor saves us a substantial amount of

money, and as a nonprofit, those dollars directly impact the people we serve." Lisa Anderson, also a team lead at ThriftWorks! adds, "This is a great opportunity for our trainees to learn another piece of equipment that can be used when they work out in the community. It is a safer and cleaner way for us to get rid of waste, and we couldn't be happier, it's wonderful!"



Thank you Benton Telecommunications Foundation, and our donor, for seeing the value in creating a cost effective and safe solution for our trash!

DAY AT THE CAPITOL DISABILITY SERVICES

March 8th, 2022, was the annual Disability Services Day at the Capitol. Annually thousands of people with disabilities across Minnesota gather together, this year virtually, to advocate and meet with state representatives regarding the services available, or lack of services, to those with disabilities.

The WACOSA team rallied together and raised our voices and/or our signs demanding better pay for DSPs both in the homes we live in as well as vocational and community integration supports, like WACOSA.

Interested in advocating for people with disabilities?
To find your representative in Minnesota go to:

www.gis.lcc.mn.gov/iMaps/districts

or search the internet for
"find my representative."



STEVE HOWARD'S GOODBYE



With my impending retirement September 30, 2022, a number of individuals have asked how I wish to be remembered as WACOSA's most recent, fourteen-year Executive Director. This, being my final message for the Buzz Newsletter, I thought about the many new and innovative, strategic directions WACOSA

has taken in my tenure as the organization's leader, attributable most decidedly to the hard work and dedication of so many WACOSA clients, leaders and team members. To be sure, WACOSA serves and employs an amazing team of talented and committed individuals, rarely seen in my 36 years of professional service. As I considered the question, two key points emerge in my thinking: the difference between "accomplishments" and the impact of "lasting influence". With these differences in mind, I think now I can answer the question.

As many of you are aware, I was fortunate enough to be co-guardian of a brother who experienced mental, behavioral, and physical challenges that prevented him from pursuing a life of independence that most of us take for granted every day. Danny passed away in 2017, yet prior to his death, he enjoyed a quality of life of his own making; one not generally accepted as "quality" by those around him, yet overwhelmingly significant to those he touched. Regardless of his many challenges, today my brother can be credited with inspiring the launch of not only my own career, but that of my veteran Special Education Teacher wife, my two daughters (graduates of social work and counseling programs) and my sister, who is a trained Physical Therapy Assistant. Indeed, by the world's standards, my brother "accomplished" very little in terms

of conventional productivity in his fifty-two years of life. Yet, his "lasting influence" was impressive.

As WACOSA's out-going Executive Director, one of the greatest tragedies I can envision is the loss of what we, as human beings, might learn from others who have experienced a journey we will eventually undertake. It has long been said that, "We are all on the road to disability. Each of us is just arriving at different times". Which one of us would not seek advice from someone who has already been where we must eventually go? Consider the lessons we can learn from many who are experts in living with challenges every day, lessons we must all come to learn sooner or later. Listening to and observing the life experiences of those we serve, along with watching the proficiency with which they address the hurdles they encounter, can provide all of us a picture of dignity and remarkable wisdom that can strengthen and equip us, as well as help inform our own journey through life.

Our ancestors used the word "influence" to refer to a celestial fluid that was believed to flow out of the stars and other heavenly bodies. As this fluid reached the Earth, it supposedly affected or "influenced" the actions of our world's inhabitants. It is my fervent hope that people will remember me as a leader who, by example, drew his passion and strategic vision from our WACOSA stars; individuals who have a universe of skills to share about overcoming difficulty and showing us what we might accomplish if we are brave enough to follow wherever our dreams may lead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Howard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NANCY BETTS



August 2022 marks my 30th anniversary at WACOSA; never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that I would spend my career in

one place that long. Then my thoughts turn to all the people we serve now, and have served, and instantly I feel at home. They are why I have dedicated my career to WACOSA; the people we serve are truly talented, amazing, and deserving of the support needed to reach their dreams and it is my pleasure to be of service.

As we reflect on our retiring Executive Director, Steve Howard, with his steady leadership and guidance for the last 14+ years it is apparent that WACOSA is a better and stronger organization. He truly helped shape the current success of DocuShred, ThriftWorks, and our First Avenue program. Steve's many achievements over his tenure have led to more and greater opportunities for those we serve, and on their behalf, I extend to Steve, my deepest gratitude for all you have done.

As I take on the role of Executive Director I look forward to working with our teams to foster new and creative opportunities for community activities and employment that result in positive impacts for each of those we currently serve and those that are waiting to return after COVID.

In 2023 as we mark WACOSA's 60th anniversary, I invite you all to help us celebrate our successes, reflect on our growth, and focus on developing our future. Thank you, WACOSA, for making me always feel at home these last 30 years. Thank you all, for your continued support as I look forward to the future successes we are creating together.



LEADERSHIP TEAM

Nancy Betts
Executive Director

Beth Sueker
Operations Manager

Maggie Dilks
Human Resources Manager

Traci McKinnon
Finance Director

Roxanne Ryan Layne
Business Development

Jenny Zimmer
Business Development

Pat Flicker
Fund Development Manager

Ann Kennedy
Sales & Marketing Director

Mary Rothstein
Sauk Centre Site Coordinator

Stephanie Schaefer
Senior Site Coordinator

Lynn Welle
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Herb Trenz

Sandie Westergren

Would you like to receive the newsletter and other WACOSA communication via email?

Please send your full name and email address to akennedy@wacosa.org to get on our email list!

Policy Revision Notice

For updated 245D Policies, please visit wacosa.org/client-services or contact us at 320-251-0087 to request a written copy.

WACOSA is an EEO/AA Employer

WACOSA provides equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment and prohibits discrimination and harassment of any type without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status, familial status, membership or activity in a local human rights commission, or status with regard to public assistance. We will take affirmative steps to ensure that all of our company's employment practices are free of discrimination.



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