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Necessary Risk

Have you ever had a strong desire to do something but were afraid to do so for fear of failing, loss of finances, hardship, the stigma it might create etc.? As a youth, I played virtually every sport, eventually gravitating toward basketball, since my height equipped me naturally for the skills needed to be successful. Upon reflection, the jury remains deadlocked on whether or not I ever really accomplished any success at the sport. However, I still recall a moment in my basketball career that remains etched in my mind and that has helped to shape the way I see life and leadership in my current role as an Executive Director. The score of the game we were playing was close and, in the scheme of season games, was important to our team’s game-winning percentage. As the clock ticked down, I found the ball in my hands with only moments left to hit a critical basket. I had a clear path to drive the basket and, in other situations, the skills necessary to score the points we needed. On my drive in, I found myself passing the ball off to another player to make the shot, not because his position was better, but because I was afraid to fail. An unnoticed moment for many, but evident to some, like my coach. While hard to admit, I do believe my failure that day was more pronounced for failing to shoot, rather than for shooting and potentially missing the basket. The quote from famous hockey player Wayne Gretzky, “You always miss 100% of the shots you don’t take”, could not be truer, not only for sports professionals and youths during high school basketball games, but also for non-profit organizations in the changing times in which live.

This month’s edition of WACOSA’s Buzz Newsletter highlights our newly developing ThriftWorks! Thrift Store, a venture not without risk, but one that is clearly growing in revenue, as well as branding opportunity for our organization. Almost daily we hear, “I never knew what you all did until I visited your store”. When naysayers asked during the development of the ThriftWorks! Business Plan, “What exactly do you know about running a thrift store?” My response was, “Once we operate one, then we will know how”. WACOSA’s 4,500 square foot ThriftWorks! Thrift Store display floor has completed almost 5 years of operation, generating nearly $270,000 in store sales, receives just shy of 10,000 donations a year and has hosted 47 trainees in its Retail Training Program since it began in May 2013. 15 of whom have accomplished competitive employment. Studies related to risk-taking among Americans indicate that fear remains the number one reason why people fail to leave the safety of the sidelines to pursue new initiatives, often for a broad spectrum of both personal and professional reasons. English author, Lewis Carroll once said, “In the end, we only regret the chances we didn’t take”. Given the current unsteady landscape of Health and Human Services, we must ask ourselves, “Are we risking enough to locate greater opportunities on behalf of those we serve?”

In a career that has spanned over 30 years, I have witnessed a decided evolution in rehabilitation services away from the certainty of traditional entitlement dollars that were once all but expected from state and federal governments. Actual, perceived or future threatened rate cuts, brought about by service/system redesign, has created significant anxiety for many providers asking how the complexion of future funding will look or, indeed, if funding will be available at all. In truth, now more than ever, non-profit organizations owe it to those we serve and to the legacy of our organizations to explore new roads of opportunity that encourage a migration away from relying so heavily upon county, state and federally matched funding. While complete separation from these funding sources will likely never be possible, more can and should be done to embrace the attitude of those business entrepreneurs willing to assume necessary risk to expand revenue streams and open the doors to new opportunities. While most would agree that luck plays an abiding role in the success of any new risk or venture, I am convinced we often make our own luck by fostering new opportunities, which perpetually creates new ventures, and so it goes.

Business Coach and Co-Leader of Rhapsody Strategies, Eric Deschamps, remarks, “Risk-takers are a different breed. They live in the realm of possibility and greatness. They are not afraid to live beyond the boundaries and to color outside the lines. To them, there is no such thing as failure; only experiments that didn’t work!” Here’s hoping, as non-profit organizations and developing entrepreneurs, we all learn to “color outside of the lines” and consider necessary risk, in order to honor the risks those we serve venture to take each and every day of their lives.

Steve Howard
WACOSA Executive Director
WACOSA hosted their 4th annual Harvesting Happiness Breakfast on October 11, 2017 at Automotive Parts Headquarters, (APH) in St. Cloud, MN. The annual event celebrates the determination and successes of people with disabilities. Over $33,000 was raised and 102 people attended the event. Thank you to all of our sponsors, donors, family and friends who participated to make this event successful. Special thank you to our guest speaker, Willow Sweeney.

If you are interested in attending the next breakfast event, or becoming a sponsor, please contact Carrie Peterson, WACOSA’s Fund Development Manager, at 320-257-5193 or cpeterson@wacosa.org.

Thank You to our Sponsors!

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Roxanne Ryan-Layne, Roger Schleper, Willow Sweeney
Author and speaker, Margaret Mead, once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Without a doubt, I think we could consider Ms. Mead an “Advocate”, in the truest sense of the word.

A single drop of water has limited power to overcome whatever stands before it, while a torrential flow can be one of the single, most powerful forces on earth. The voice of advocacy is much like water. While effective on its own, its power to influence becomes exponential, as a torrential flow of voices takes up the cause. History is replete with critical moments where advocacy, in one form or fashion, has changed the course of human existence. As Americans we have grown to expect our rights advocated for, even to the point of death, under protections granted us by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America. Throughout history, the lives of individuals with disabilities have been changed time and again, in no small measure, by the voice of advocates and, in some cases, self-advocates who could no longer endure prejudices, injustices and atrocities performed against themselves and/or others who often could not speak on their own behalf. While few would argue that time has improved the lives of many with cognitive and/or physical challenges, those of us who live with or provide services for individuals with disabilities daily realize there is much work that remains to be done.

In this issue of the Buzz, we wish to remind you that your voice matters, whether it be for yourself or for someone you love and/or support. The ever-changing and ever-competing interests within our state and federal governments have created an environment where your voice must be heard loud, clear and now. It remains infinitely clear that, under current state and federal administrations, funding for disability-related services is far from a priority and, in fact, is often viewed as overfunded by some state and federal leaders. The resulting debacle is creating a service system that leaves disability services underfunded to the point that the “human” part of “human services” is becoming less and less evident over time. System changes that could ultimately result in funding reductions, as well as the failure to consider increases in funding, are creating an environment in which obtaining and retaining qualified staff to deliver services to individuals with disabilities is at a critical level. It is estimated...
that 10,000 or more Direct Support Professional (DSP) positions in Minnesota are going unfilled, as requests for legislative increases in funding for community rehabilitation programs like WACOSA are ignored. Never forget that your voice of advocacy has the power to influence governmental leaders and turn the tide of current events. Advocacy organizations like Minnesota Family and Advocates Coalition (MNFAC) www.mnfacgroup.com continue to grow stronger, as voices across Minnesota are raised in protest. You can and should be part of this protest on behalf of yourself and/or those you love and support. After all, we are all on the road to being disabled at some point in our lives. Each of us is just arriving at that point at different times. When our time comes, let’s hope the voice of advocacy is there to speak on our behalf, especially if we are unable to do so for ourselves.

On January 4th, 2018, WACOSA clients, staff and board members had the pleasure of touring WACOSA’s Waite Park facility with Minnesota’s 6th District US Congressman Tom Emmer, District 14A Rep. Tama Theis, and Stearns County 2nd District County Commissioner and WACOSA board member, Joe Perske. Two WACOSA clients, Tom Kempenich and David Williamsen, had the opportunity to share with the elected officials the important role that WACOSA, Medicaid, and work opportunities play in their lives. Thank you to our elected officials for spending your time to learn more about the issues important to adults with disabilities in our community.
THRIFTWORKS!

ThriftWorks! was established in 2013 with the original concept of being a retail training program serving people with autism. Since its inception, ThriftWorks! has grown and changed dramatically. Today, ThriftWorks! serves a range of individuals with varying abilities, with a focus on developing each trainee’s social-emotional proficiency, more commonly referred to as “soft skills”, in the Health and Human Services Industry. Mastering these critical abilities will open a range of employment skills that can be used effectively in a large number of employment settings, throughout all walks of life. Graduates of ThriftWorks! go on to seek employment in multiple fields throughout our community.” The success of WACOSA’s ThriftWorks! Thrift Store relies firmly upon our dedication to a person-centered approach, not just to our clients, but to all of our constituents. We focus on attending to and listening to the needs of each of our customers and stakeholders. Whether it be the needs of those we serve, our families, our donors, our funding partners or our customers, all are worthy of our best effort, regardless of the needs they may have”, states Steve Howard.

Lisa and Kayla are driving forces behind the growth and development of WACOSA’s ThriftWorks! Thrift Store. With 32 years of combined retail experience, they are each dedicated to helping make ThriftWorks! a truly unique thrifting opportunity for our customers. “Their dedication to the vision and mission of WACOSA is second to none. Lisa and Kayla are a central part of the ThriftWorks! Operation,” Steve Howard shares. “Not only do they want a great shopping experience for every customer who enters our store, but they care deeply about the successes of both their staff and the trainees WACOSA serves. Our ThriftWorks! Thrift Store would look very different without their expertise and leadership. We are grateful they are a part of our WACOSA team.”

Join our email mailing list! Find out about our monthly specials and receive a 50% off one item coupon every month! Sign up today by texting THRIFTWORKS to 22828 or by emailing info@wacosa.org.
Rose, who graduated from the ThriftWorks! Thrift store training program in 2017, is a great example of the successes we see daily at WACOSA. Throughout the 13 years she has been served by WACOSA, Rose has learned how to budget her money, gained life and social skills, as well as gaining life-changing confidence in herself. “WACOSA understood me as an individual”, reports Rose.

“Rose had a lot of barriers in her life,” states Kayla Goering, Team Lead at ThriftWorks!. “But she never allowed any of these challenges to stand in her way of success. “She is definitely a determined woman. Rose has been independently employed by JC Penney for slightly over a year. In January, 2018, she was honored with the title of Associate of the Month. Rose is excited about her career path and proudly boasted, “I have adjusted a lot throughout this past year and am very happy. I came from being a shy lady to an outgoing lady who loves staying busy every day”.

Gordon

Gordon has participated in WACOSA’s services for 11 years, most recently working in WACOSA’s ThriftWorks! Thrift store. Gordon is driven to “spread his wings,” and is currently in the process of applying for employment in retail shops throughout the St. Cloud area. Gordon believes his staff, both at home and at work, are big players in his success. “The staff of WACOSA has helped me to advocate for myself, and to really come out of my shell,” Gordon shares.

“We’ve seen such growth in Gordon since he started as a trainee at ThriftWorks!,” states Lisa Anderson, a Team Lead at ThriftWorks!. “He is a joy to work with and has become much more comfortable working with customers in the store. We are proud of the strides he is taking to find independent employment in the community.” When not working, Gordon enjoys playing video games, watching movies, and is a self-proclaimed Star Wars nerd.
Thank you to all who were able to attend the WACOSA Pizza Ranch Fundraiser. We had a great time with family and friends. Over $875 was raised to support WACOSA programs! A special thank you to the amazing staff at Pizza Ranch, and Gabriel Media for sponsoring the event.

MINNWEST BANK DONATES FOR SAFETY EQUIPMENT AT WACOSA

WACOSA was honored to be a recipient of a $29,000 donation from MinnWest Bank designated for purchasing safety equipment for WACOSA’s staff and clients. “Safety is a top priority at WACOSA,” states Steve Howard, WACOSA’s Executive Director. “We are humbled by MinnWest Bank’s generosity and their continued dedication to the communities they serve.” WACOSA will use the funds to purchase new safety equipment and to replace aging equipment.

INITIATIVE FOUNDATION GRANT

WACOSA is the proud recipient of a $2,500 grant from The Initiative Foundation. The dollars will fund a collaborative effort between WACOSA and True Friends to provide a unique, customized training experience which focuses on enhancing leadership skills and equipping new leaders in our communities. What makes this opportunity unique is that it includes WACOSA clients, who are individuals with disabilities, and are often not offered the same opportunities to develop leadership skills.

“The WACOSA Way Award goes to staff to treat everyone with respect and dignity, even during difficult situations. They understand the importance of teamwork and brighten the day of those around them.”

This project is funded in part by The Initiative Foundation, a regional community foundation.

THE WACOSA WAY

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Kacey was nominated by Missy Hoppe, Roxi Hoeschen and Whitney Paulzine.

“Kacey always goes above and beyond to help others. She gives everyone a fair chance and is highly respected by others. She goes out of her way to help our clients meet their goals.”

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It really is possible to buy happiness. That’s what giving to WACOSA is all about. Smiling faces, sounds of laughter, making friends, building a community . . . they are all part of WACOSA’s rich abundance of gifts. The very heart of its mission is happiness. How can you not buy into that? Our brother/brother-in-law, Bill, has been a client for nearly two decades. WACOSA isn’t just a big part of his life, it’s a huge part of who he is. It doesn’t get much happier than that!

--Bruce & Melissa Nelson

SHINING STAR AWARDS

The WACOSA Shining Star Award goes to clients who are passionate and determined to overcome adversity.

Adam Elliot with Mary Rothstein
Adam Elliot – Shining Star winner Sauk Centre. Nominated by Roxi Hoeschen, Melissa Hoppe and Whitney Paulzine. “Adam is a joy to see and always has a smile on his face. He has a positive attitude and outlook on life. He treats people with respect. His positive attitude is just what staff love about him, he makes coming to WACOSA fun!”

Connie Roberts with Lindsey Gasperlin
Connie Roberts – Shining Star winner ThriftWorks! Nominated by Lindsey Gasperlin.
“Connie is always showing kindness to others, sending cards, making gifts, words of appreciation and gratitude toward staff and other clients.”

Latisia Guyton with Sarah Starling
Latisia’s nominators say, “Latisia inspires her peers to do their best in any situation. She has an unbeatable work ethic and is always going the extra mile to complete her work while encouraging others to be and do their best. She is proud of her achievements and works to increase her own success.

Melissa Linz with Julie Hanf
Julie Hanf - Shining Star winner South. Nominated by Milissa Linz.
“She brings a positive attitude with her every day. Not only is she ready and willing to work, she strives to do the best job possible. Julie inspires everyone to be their best. She truly is a Shining Star!”
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Vickie Bintz has been volunteering with WACOSA since March 2017 and has become a valued member of our team while completing over 200 hours in her first year! After working as an RN for more than 40 years, Vickie decided to retire and look for volunteer opportunities. “I have a brother with autism, and he is employed through a program similar to WACOSA. This brought me, specifically, to volunteering with your organization.”

When volunteering with WACOSA, Vickie spends her time at ThriftWorks!, helping sort and price bedding and fabric. When asked what keeps her coming back to volunteer with us, she responded:

“I enjoy volunteering with the kind and supportive staff that I have met. I feel a “part of their team”, in my limited way, which makes me look forward to returning every week. The smiles and laughter give me fond memories every time I volunteer.”

Vickie also offered some guidance to those considering volunteering with WACOSA. She said “My advice to anyone considering volunteering with WACOSA, is to make the step. You will enjoy the opportunity.” WACOSA is immeasurably grateful for the time and effort Vickie has given us!

CREATE YOUR WACOSA LEGACY

WACOSA invites you to create your WACOSA legacy, while establishing a sustainable future for adults with disabilities in Central Minnesota. By establishing a WACOSA endowment, it’s never too early to begin critical planning for your future. No matter your age or financial situation, you can make a difference. What is an endowment? A WACOSA endowment receives contributions or pledges from individuals like you who are planning the distribution of their personal wealth following their death. Once contributed or pledged, these funds remain restricted, meaning that only the interest earned from the fund can be accessed by WACOSA to help sustain WACOSA’s important mission. The principal amount given to the organization remains intact, continuing to anchor the endowment year-after-year. You can rely upon WACOSA to remain an excellent steward of your dollars, leveraging your gift to the fullest extent possible on behalf of those we serve.

If you have questions or would like more information on how to “Create Your WACOSA Legacy”, contact Carrie Peterson, Fund Development Manager, cpeterson@wacosa.org or 320-257-5193.

WAYS TO HELP

OUR MISSION:
To provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to work and live in their communities.

OUR VISION:
To empower persons of all ability levels to reach their full potential.
Joe Perske is a product of the St. Cloud area. Joe grew up in Sauk Rapids, graduated from Apollo High School, and completed degrees at St. John’s University and St. Cloud State University. He is a retired teacher with experience teaching 26 years in Sartell and has previous teaching experience in Avon, Onamia and Augsburg, Germany. He and his wife, Jan, also a retired area teacher, have 3 adult daughters, Michaela, Jenna and Greta. Joe is presently serving as a Stearns County Commissioner and has previously held elected office in Sartell as Mayor and Council Member. He ran as a candidate for U.S. Congress in 2014. He has had a long history of competitive distance running since high school and enjoys bow hunting.

Jeanne Theis has been employed at Park Industries in St. Cloud for 26 years, 21 of which is in Accounts Payable. She grew up in Foley, MN, and now lives outside of Cold Spring, MN, on a Century Farm with her husband, Jeff, and two children, Benjamin and Sarah. She enjoys reading, cooking, gardening and travel, when time permits. She volunteers with her church and is active with the EFMN and TS Alliance, who have been life savers over the past 11 years for Benjamin and her family, since Benjamin’s diagnosis of Tuberous Sclerosis Complex.

Ronald W. Brandenburg is a shareholder with the St. Cloud law firm of Quinlivan & Hughes, P.A. Ron has in excess of thirty-seven years of experience in the practice of law, focusing on representing clients primarily in the areas of labor and employment and business law. In the employment law area, Ron’s experience includes handling a variety of routine and complex employment matters, representing large and small for profit and non-profit employers, educational institutions, health care providers and professional service organizations and providing training for employers and their supervisors. In the business law area, Ron’s practice has focused on working with small and medium sized for profit and non-profit businesses on a variety of business organization and operation matters. Ron and his wife, Carol, live in Elk River, having moved there in June 2017. They have 3 children and two grandchildren. For his non-work related activities, Ron enjoys traveling, playing golf, cooking and participating in other outdoor activities, as well as volunteering on various non-profit committees and boards.

Joe Perske

Jeanne Theis

Ronald W. Brandenburg
WACOSA’s new website is now live!

Join WACOSA for A Night at the Rox!

Where: Joe Faber Field
When: June 29th, 2018
Time: 7 pm

To get your tickets, please contact us at info@wacosa.org
Part of the proceeds of each ticket purchased through WACOSA benefits WACOSA.

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