

## CMA and COVID-19: A Look Back at 2020



*From Eileen Egan, Executive Director*

To say this year has been unique, is an understatement. And, here at CMA that is true as well.

I am happy to report that CMA has not had any individuals test positive for the COVID-19 virus in the last 7 months, since the early days of the pandemic in April. We have implemented strict protocols to keep people healthy, and thankfully, they have been working. These protocols include staff and visitor health screenings and mask wearing by everyone except the people who live in the home, frequent hand washing and utilization of gloves, cleaning protocols on every shift and a doubling of the frequency of professional cleanings of the homes.

But as we see numbers increase in the community, we need to double down on our vigilance to keep the virus out of our homes, office, and day program. I have sent correspondence to families and employees about being careful over the holidays and limiting the number of people everyone gets exposed to. In addition to requiring COVID-19 testing as per Governor Cuomo's travel advisory, we are also asking people to get tested if they come in contact with out-of-state guests in their homes. We are asking families who bring their family member home for more than two days to have that family member tested before they come back to their housemates at CMA. Although shortening visits is a disappointment for many people, our hope is that one year from now, the pandemic will be controlled by vaccines and we will be able to return to more time with our families.

Our experience in March and April was horrific. I never want to have our people in so much danger ever again. CMA staff did an incredible job following protocols and preventing spread, but still people suffered. Individuals in the following homes got sick over those 6 weeks:

**Kings Point:** 1 person out of 12 tested positive for the virus.

**Avenue C:** 1 person out of 8 got sick with the virus.

**Apartments:** 2 roommates (out of 10 people) experienced COVID.

**Dix Hills:** 2 people out of 7 tested positive for the virus. They both required hospitalization due to complications, but they both were released to recover at home.

**Tulip Drive, home for seniors:** All 6 individuals living in the home caught the virus. 5 out of the 6 required hospitalization. Two individuals lost their lives.

Fortunately, no one living at **Arleigh, Hidden, Carleton, Massapequa, or Irma** got sick with COVID. Although the renovations on our newest home in **Malverne** were delayed, we were able to successfully open the home for 6 young women in September, and everyone there has been healthy as well. About 12 staff reported positive results from COVID tests during this time period. Two or three cases can be tied to cases in the residences. Most occurred without any correlation to illnesses in the homes, thanks to good reporting and quarentining.

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# New York State Slashes Payments to Group Homes, Disincentivizing Overnight Family Visits

As New York State's 2020 Budget deficit increased this year due to COVID, the Governor, Department of Health, and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities have made deep cuts to providers of group homes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These cuts are devastating to programs, and have put the future of some agencies in the state at risk, which will cause them to merge or be taken over by other organizations.

The cuts have hit providers primarily in 2 areas. The first is payments toward room and board. Prior to the pandemic, effective July 1, 2019, the New York State cut providers' room and board payments by 12%. Our room and board payments had been determined based on actual costs, so now we were essentially being told, you must figure out how to cover 12% of your costs through service cuts or fundraising. Since we cannot lower our mortgage payments or utilities, and we are not going to provide less food to people, we need to find other ways to make up the difference.

In June 2020, the Governor made the decision that he will hold back 20% of all state-only payments to agencies, which means we are not receiving an additional 20% of our payments for room and board, on top of the 12% cuts. This policy will also affect aid to local governments and school districts, as well as families who use self-direction or receive other state funded family support services.

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- The Governor states that he must continue to withhold these funds until the federal government provides more assistance to New York. We have not been assured that we will ever see the funds that have been withheld, and have no idea how long this holdback or cut will continue.

The second type of funding cuts, which went into effect October 1, remove payments to organizations when individuals are not present in their residence, either because they are on a "Therapeutic Leave", such as an overnight visit to family or an overnight admission to a hospital or rehab facility, or someone has left the home permanently. So essentially, the state is forcing agencies to ask families to shorten their family member's stays when they go home for overnight visits or on vacation together. It is not fair to put agencies in that position. We do not want to interfere with families' decisions about how they connect. But even if one person is away from the home for a night, we still need to pay our full mortgage and utility costs, we still need to pay staff for providing services to the other people in the residence, and if the person is in the hospital, we may need additional staff so that we can visit the hospital, bring favorite foods, and keep the person company. Now we may not be able to do that. We will be reimbursed 50% less for Therapeutic Days, up to annual per person cap. After reaching the cap, the agency will receive \$0 for the days the person is out of the residence. Based on the number of Therapeutic Leave (and Hospital and Rehab days) used in 2019, CMA is anticipating a loss of approximately \$500,000 for these visits in 2021.

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# Community Mainstreaming's 15th Annual Comedy Night – Quarantine Edition

As the sun set on the summer of 2020 congregating of any kind was not an option. For the last 14 years CMA's Annual Comedy Night has been one of the "can't miss" events of the year. If supporters couldn't come to us, CMA would bring the laughs to them!

Thursday, August 13th was a special night, more than 150 people logged on to participate in CMA's first ever virtual event. With the difficulties of the prior 5 months, a laugh was just what the doctor ordered, and the show did not disappoint. It was an interactive extravaganza, spearheaded by Comedy Event Co-Chair and comedian extraordinaire, Ray Ellin. Attendees were not merely passive audience members but active participants in the evening's festivities.

CMA's Comedy Night Committee co-chaired by Ray Ellin, Matt Engel, Erica Lee-Benedetto and Daniel Mickelson made their 15th Annual Comedy Night one of their most successful events to date. The members of the committee continue to dedicate their time and energy, reaching out to their families, friends and business associates for support and assistance. Each committee member feels passionately about the good work CMA provides to men and women with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The outpouring of responses resulted in a truly incredible evening.

A very special Thank You to Aggressive Energy; Lerner Arnold & Winston, LLP; Catherine DeMartini and the DeMartini Family; Langsam Property Services; Meszaros Engineering and VM Mangement, LLC for being our top sponsors.

The evening netted a whopping \$40,000 for individuals CMA serves. Much needed funds to help offset the unforeseen expense of personal protection equipment and other safety measures.

**If interested in joining the Comedy Night Committee, email  
[contactus@communitymainstreaming.org](mailto:contactus@communitymainstreaming.org)**



# Community Mainstreaming's 26th Annual Golf & Tennis Tournament a Success!

Golfers and tennis players alike came out to the Muttontown Club to partake in CMA's 26th Annual Golf & Tennis Tournament. On October 19th, long-time supporters and new friends converged on the bucolic grounds of The Muttontown Club in East Norwich for a day of sport and camaraderie while participating in competitions, enjoying sumptuous food, and winning awards and prizes. The event netted \$108,000, which will directly benefit the men and women who live in CMA's group homes and supportive apartments.

The Tournament, led by Co-Chairs Matt Engel, Neil Levy, Jeff Pinsky and the event's committee, was stellar, and whom along with dedicated volunteers made possible what seemed improbable this year.

This year posed unique challenges in planning and executing the event, the safety of all attendees and volunteers was paramount. For the well-being of everyone all portions of the outing were held outside, and social distance was honored by all in attendance. The on-course contests were minimized this year to keep interactions to a minimum, Putting Contest, headed by CMA Board Member Joe DiMaggio was tweaked to conform to social distancing standards and the long-standing Threesome Giveaway was a hit as always.

Special thanks you to a few of our longtime supporters, including Aggressive Energy (2020 Pebble Beach Sweepstakes Winner); Coder & Company, CPA; ePromos Promotional Products, Inc.; Diamond Property Group; Langsam Property Services; Lerner Arnold & Winston, LLP; Masters Exterminating and Pest Control; Milbrook Properties; Sierra Consulting Group; Signature Bank; Sprague Energy, Tekniverse, Inc. and Wolinetz Management.

The outing this year was held in honor of all of CMA's frontline workers. When schools and businesses started closing, our staff risked their own health and that of their families, to make sure that CMA residents were cared for properly. They did an amazing job over the course of several very frightening months. They continue to protect and support many quarantine-fatigued people and make great efforts to keep bodies healthy and spirits happy. The residents of our Massapequa Home accepted the award via video conference during the dinner portion of the outing. We are tremendously thankful for CMA's Essential Heroes.

**For information about joining CMA's Annual Golf & Tennis Tournament Planning Committee please call CMA at 516-683-0710.**



# Community Mainstreaming's Feed-A-Home Program: A nutritional bridge over troubled waters

In March, with the onset of COVID-19 on Long Island, our world at CMA's homes was full of fear and empty supermarket shelves adding additional burden to the crisis. Market delivery services, which usually provide groceries to Community Mainstreaming's homes, were unavailable and local restaurants were struggling during the lockdown. A need to safely secure provisions for our residents was paramount, and CMA got to work bridging the gap with the help of our extended family and a few new friends.

The Feed-A Home Program was introduced to tackle three pressing issues: to alleviate the chores of cooking and cleaning up for the staff who already have so much to do, just overseeing the medical, personal, and entertainment needs of the people living in the homes; to reduce the need for frequent shopping, which present many logistics for us: staff to do it, exposure to other people, money to use, empty shelves at the market. Our typical Pea Pod delivery service was not available because all the delivery slots were filled; finally, the ability to support your favorite restaurant by placing a take-out order and having it delivered to CMA.

Launched on the last week of March, the program was rolled out in three stages, family support, CMA board and committees, and mass outreach. Using the first stage to work out any problems, CMA Board Member Nancy Axelrad Comer and daughter Eliza, stepped up to assist in the logistics.

**“During the second stage CMA Board and the Golf and Tennis Committee buoyed the program and eased an ever-growing workload for our essential workers. Every home had at least two days of dinner covered and many had almost every night covered. A group of long-time Golf and Tennis Committee members “adopted” the Massapequa home and provided dinners for two months!”**

- Nancy

Spearheaded by Frank Delucia of HUB International, the group was excited to lend a hand. “When things were locked down it was all hands-on deck. We all got involved as a team and I was proud to see it.” James Slattery of Original Energy remarked “As a 25-year friend of CMA, it was my duty to step up during that unprecedented time. It was truly an honor to help and I thank Eileen and staff for involving me.” Once ready to expand, the final stage was to reach out to the entire donor base resulting in donations from all over the country to support the program.

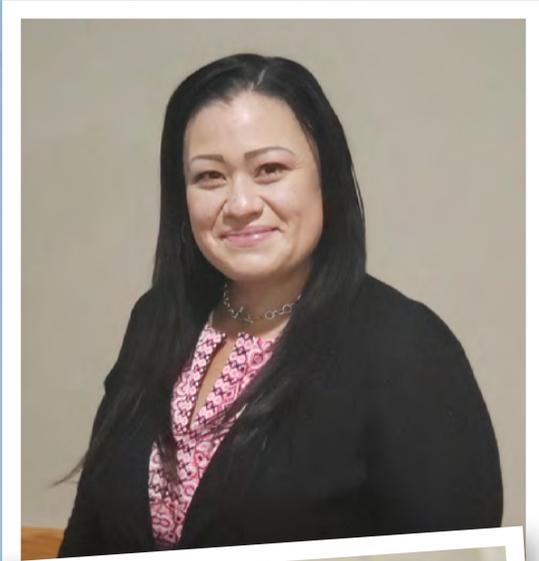
By the end of May supermarket shelves were once again replenished and grocery delivery services were back on line. Thank you to all that supported Feed-A-Home, by cooking, ordering dinner and donating. With this support, the program provided an estimated 400 family dinners nourishing our residents through the toughest months of Spring 2020.



# Employee Spotlight

## Henny Calle - Assistant Director of Residential Services

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Henny started at CMA in 2014 as a part-time DSP. She came to the agency as a referral from another employee, which is always our favorite way to find new employees! Henny has worked as a DSP in many of our homes, but much of her time supporting the residents of CMA was in our Irma, Hidden and Tulip residences. One of the residents at another house recently referred to Henny as “RJ’s best friend.”

Henny was the live-in DSP at the Tulip residence for several years. Here she ensured that the manager was kept up to date on all the support activities at the home during the overnight and morning shifts.

Hired as one of the program’s assistant directors in February 2019, Henny oversees three of our homes: Kings Point, Tulip and Penn Court. She is dedicated to the success and safety of each person that she supports and is an ardent advocate for ensuring their needs are met. Henny has developed fantastic relationships with many of the families of the people we support. She is always willing to roll up her sleeves and jump in to assist her team with whatever they need to be successful.

When COVID hit in March, Henny’s homes were hit the hardest. Henny practically moved into the homes to ensure that there was enough staff available to care for the residents. PPE was extremely difficult to come by at this time and we all worried that there might come a time that we would not have what we need. Henny jumped into action, looking for ways to make our own PPE. She taught the teams how to make homemade face shields out of plastic headbands and clear sheet protectors, she learned how to make protective gowns out of garbage bags and created a video so we could share with our other houses. Henny frequently had to put her own feelings aside and “keep it together” for her team members as well as the residents as we experienced the worst situations, losing two

residents to COVID from one of the homes. Henny bravely suited up and went into the hospital to visit the residents and provided the families the opportunity to say their good-byes over Facetime. In CMA’s darkest hour, Henny never stopped being a beacon of light.

Henny is a dedicated leader of the residential program. She has a Master’s degree from Hunter College and a Bachelor’s degree from Lehman College. Henny has over 15 years of experience working in programs for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. It is obvious that she loves her work and is loved and appreciated by so many of the people she supports!



## Election Day 2020 at CMA's Program Without Walls

On Tuesday November 4th, CMA's PWW hosted a special Election Day workshop for program participants. Being a Presidential Election year, Coordinator Jessenia Lara led a slideshow informing the program participants of their rights as US citizens and the democratic process. Director of Day Services Miguel Torres-Castro discussed the voting process and the Electoral College and its role in the election of the president. The group had a meaningful and respectful discussion about both candidates.

Following the group discussion, one participant Ariana began to draw a series of colorful characters of "voters" during Creative Art Group. She created various drawings inspired by the Presidential Election and the challenging year we've experienced. Ariana was happy and proud to show through her art the lessons of the workshop.

## Halloween at CMA

**Trick or treat:** the staff and residents had been looking forward to celebrating Halloween for weeks! Some houses planned trips out to the east end of Long Island, where residents could enjoy walking through corn mazes, going on haunted hayrides, and scouring the pumpkin fields to pick the perfect pumpkin to decorate. Back at home, staff and residents worked together to create the spookiest costumes and decorations. Many residents enjoyed "decorating parties", where Halloween movies and music were played while everyone decorated their homes. Some even wore their costumes while they decorated!

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**Day Program:** CMA's "Program Without Walls" Day Program needed to make big changes when things shut down in March. We were not able to pick people up from different households and go into the community every day, because travelling in the van together was not safe, and most places in the community were closed. Our staff were re-deployed to CMA homes, to run programs there, and our management staff and music therapist began planning Zoom sessions that everyone could participate in virtually. In August, we were permitted to begin picking people up with 50% capacity in our vehicles and use our CMA office spaces to provide opportunities to gather with social distancing. In order to keep the numbers down, we have continued to provide day services to CMA residents based out of their homes. We have been able to provide out-of-home services to people living at home with their families, because we were concerned about them feeling socially isolated and forgotten. Approximately 50% of the people who participate in our Day Program live at home with their parents.

**Costs:** The financial costs of the Pandemic have been extreme, and New York State has done nothing to help us with those costs. We have spent over \$100,000 on PPE (personal protective equipment) including gloves, gowns, face shields, and masks, and tens of thousands more on supplies for cleaning and sanitizing our homes and office. We have had to increase our staffing in order to cover daytime shifts for people who had previously been attending work or outside day programs. We also had to increase staffing at our apartments for people who live more independently, in order to help them navigate living through the pandemic, by abiding health guidance protocols, and obtaining food, supplies, and medical services.

We experienced wonderful support from our long-term donors this year, even though many of them have experienced business challenges. This included two months of donating meals through our "Feed A Home" program (see separate story), and participation in our virtual Comedy event and, delayed but wonderful, Golf and Tennis outing.

On behalf of the entire CMA team, we are extremely grateful to all of you for supporting us through this historically difficult time, and we will be grateful for anything you can do to help us going forward. We wish you all good health and prosperity in the year to come.

## Halloween at CMA

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When the weekend of Halloween finally arrived, there was no shortage of activities to choose from. On Friday night, CMA hosted a Zoom Costume and Dance Party, thrown by Dena Pittman, Recreation Coordinator. Everyone had a blast as they watched each other dance and monster-mash the night away! On Halloween Day, many people got dressed up to go trick-or-treating or to hand out candy to people who came to their door. Some houses had costume parties and watched Halloween classics like "Hocus Pocus," "Beetlejuice," or "The Wizard of Oz". Other houses opted to carve Jack O' Lanterns and bake Halloween-inspired cookies. Saturday night the agency came together for our Virtual Halloween Contest, where prizes were given out for the best-decorated house, the best-decorated pumpkin, and the best costume. The judges received a lot of great entries, and they had some tough decisions to make. After much deliberation, the awards were as follows:

### **Best House Decorations:**

Malverne

### **Best Costume:**

**1st Place** - Jen R. @ KP

**2nd Place** - Steve L. @ Tulip

**3rd Place** - Luke L @ Kings Point

**4th Place** - Patty Mc. @ Malverne

**5th Place** - Liz E. @ SLP

### **Best Pumpkin:**

**1st Place** - Kathleen B. @ KP

**2nd Place** - Jason S. @ Carleton

**3rd Place** - Tonia I. @ KP

Although Covid-19 may have forced us to do things somewhat differently, we were determined to ensure that our residents had a fantastic Halloween. Thanks to the hard work, dedication, and creativity of our wonderful staff and managers, CMA was able to make Halloween 2020 a success.

# New York State Slashes Payments to Group Homes, Disincentivizing Overnight Family Visits

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Finally, if someone leaves CMA because they pass away or move somewhere else, CMA will have a “vacancy” until OPWDD refers a new person and that person is ready to move in. That could take months, and very often, it’s many months. OPWDD has an “Emergency List” of people they need to place before they will refer typical families and individuals who would be most compatible for the homes. Up until July 2020, our reimbursement included a vacancy factor to help pay the homes’ expenses when there are vacancies. That vacancy factor has now been removed, costing CMA another \$250,000 in 2021.

The saddest part of this broken referral system is that because agencies are not able to fill the vacancies they have in group homes, many are closing some of their homes. In the meantime, there are hundreds of individuals and families who would love to have those opportunities, but instead, they just sit on a waiting list and “wait”.

Agencies and families need to work together to advocate for what families need and want, by calling, writing, and visiting their state assemblymen and assemblywomen and state senators. We cannot let the state disassemble a system that took families and advocates 40 years to build. There should be choices available for people, through both certified services and self-directed services, and sometimes, a mix of both.

CMA has been tightly managing our finances over the past 10 years and prior to the pandemic, we considered ourselves small but mighty. COVID hit us hard, with big expenses such as personal protective equipment, extra cleaning and sanitizing, and hazard pay and overtime for staff caring for individuals who were sick with the virus. We hope that through the help of federal rescue programs, and the generosity of our donors, we will end 2020 in the black. But with these new cuts, we are looking at a \$500,000+ loss in 2021, and that is not sustainable. We need your help.

Please contact your local legislators and tell them these vacancy cuts and withholding of funds for OPWDD programs must stop. If you are in a position to make a donation to our organization, we are greatly appreciative. **Please visit our website for more information.**

**DONATE NOW**

# Malverne Opening: September 2020 At Long Last!

After what felt like a lifetime of waiting, Community Mainstreaming welcomed six new residents into their new home this September 2020! Although the pandemic made this “welcome home” very different from our previous move in days; it was still a very exciting day for everyone, the families, the staff and most importantly, the young women who now have a home of their own.

Logistics including having to space out the moves to ensure social distancing, and limiting the time and space family members could have access in the house. For the first week, the women had to wear masks in the house except when they were eating, sleeping or bathing and there were no community activities for the first week.

Fortunately, the amazing residential support team, which included Calveina Forde, residence manager, Chris Mc Mullan, assistant director of residential services, as well as the team of dedicated direct support professional staff ensured the week was full of arts and crafts, card games, workout sessions, movies, and even a margarita- karaoke party! (alcohol-free, of course).

Since the second week, the women have been able to resume some of their regular day activities and have been able to go into the community; eat out with family, go apple and pumpkin picking, and take walks. They are starting to get to know their neighborhood and even baked cookies to share with their new neighbors. Overall, the community has been welcoming and supportive.

The women are also beginning to work on learning new skills such as laundry, house chores, cooking and caring for their rooms. These skills will help them to become more independent in their daily lives.

The staff are learning more about each woman each day: what they like and dislike, what they can do for themselves, and what they need staff support with. We have all learned that they really love their cell phones! We are also developing relationships with their families and loved ones and will continue to develop partnerships to ensure each person receives the best supports as they continue to learn and gain new skills.

Recently, on a zoom call with the agency board of directors, the women were happy to show off their home and let the board know how happy they are. When asked what they liked best, one of the women said, “living with my friends”. Proof that CMA provides the house, but the people who live there make it a home.

