



Roses for Autism won “Best Roses of 2017” from Connecticut Magazine. This is the second year in a row that this award has been given to us, and we would like to thank our customers and supporters for the help.

**From the Grant Desk...**

GRANT FUNDER	AMOUNT INVESTED	PURPOSE
Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities	\$10,000	To support the TIP Squad
William Randolph Hearst Foundations	\$75,000	To support transition services for young adults with disabilities



On Saturday October 7th, nearly 75 people including individuals served by Ability Beyond, employees and their families came out to Dickinson Park in Newtown, CT for an afternoon of fun! Guests enjoyed a delicious lunch, face painting, and music. Local businesses donated food and supplies. Special thanks to Lynn and Jay Willie, Mike and Maureen Donovan, and all of the amazing volunteers and family members who came out to help and enjoy the day.



**Annual Autumn Breakfast Honors Mental Health Advocates In CT**

(Bethel, CT)- October 9, 2017- Ability Beyond will host its Autumn Breakfast honoring community members who are making a difference in the lives of individuals with mental health challenges on Wednesday, November 15th. The annual event benefitting the Mental Health Services of the nonprofit organization will be held from 7:30 - 9:00 a.m. at the Ethan Allen Hotel at 21 Lake Avenue Ext., in Danbury, CT.

Funds raised assist men and women living with mental illnesses by helping them find a job and their own home to become part of the community. All proceeds go directly to Ability Beyond programs. This high profile fundraiser attracts approximately 120 attendees each year, and last year's breakfast raised \$53,000. This year, there are two distinguished honorees; Dr. Charles Herrick, the Theresa Foss Memorial Award Recipient and Keynote speaker, and Marie Sturdevant, the Celine Karraker Memorial Award Recipient. Ability Beyond's CEO Jane Davis is looking forward to expressing her gratitude to the dedicated volunteers for their outstanding contributions.

“We are so fortunate to have both of these amazing people supporting our organization,” explained Davis. “Dr. Herrick has served as our consulting psychiatrist on the Ability Beyond Internal Program Review Committee/Ethics Committee for a long time and Marie selflessly shares her talent and time through countless volunteer and civic commitments across Connecticut.”

Tickets are \$40 for individual seats and \$250 for a table of eight. Guests must RSVP by November 4th by contacting Kelsey Rondeau at [Kelsey.Rondeau@abilitybeyond.org](mailto:Kelsey.Rondeau@abilitybeyond.org) or calling 203-826-3183. Sponsorships and corporate advertising are also available.



Charles Herrick, MD, has been at Danbury Hospital for the past 15 years and has been the Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Western Connecticut Health Network since 2006. He has an undergraduate degree in biology from the University of Illinois in Champaign/ Urbana, and an MD from Southern Illinois University. He completed his internship and residency in psychiatry at New England Medical Center/Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, and his fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute. Dr. Herrick has also worked as an outpatient psychiatrist at Keiser in South San Francisco and as an inpatient and emergency room psychiatrist at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx.



Marie Sturdevant was a Court Reporter in Chappaqua, Mt. Kisco, and Bedford, NY from 1957 until her retirement in 2002. She also clerked for the Midwestern Connecticut Council on Alcoholism. She is currently Chairman of the Catchment Area Council #21 which studies and evaluates existing mental health services in the catchment area and makes recommendations about the types of services needed. She is also a volunteer driver for Brookfield FISH. At the Newtown Congregational Church, Marie is a Deacon, a member of the Woman's Fellowship Circle, and Chairman of the Ways & Means and the 300th Anniversary Celebration. She has been involved in many organizations over the years and is now a member of the Newtown Woman's Club, Philanthropic Education Organizations, Newtown Service Unit of Salvation Amy, Newtown United, Regional Hospice, and Home Care Advantage. ■

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## Hearst Foundations Grant To Empower Young Adults With Disabilities After High School Graduation



The Hearst Foundations have granted Ability Beyond \$75,000 to empower special education students during the transition from high school to employment, helping them achieve independent adult lives and competitive jobs within communities of their choice. The funding will support unemployment intervention programs for recent high school graduates; educational workshops and resources for families; and hands-on job training for young men and women with disabilities.

“Ability Beyond is honored to receive this generous grant investment, which provides the opportunity to change lives from the moment high school ends,” said Jane Davis, president of Ability Beyond. “Far too many young adults fall off ‘the cliff’ after graduation, because special education is discontinued and families lack the preparation to navigate the next chapter of their children’s lives. This can lead to a lifetime of social and economic marginalization. With funding from The Hearst Foundations, Ability Beyond will prepare families for this pivotal transition, and will empower young adults through information.”



Ability Beyond provides a wide range of school-to-community transition services for young adults with disabilities. In 2015 the agency redoubled its efforts through an unprecedented partnership

with the University of Wisconsin Waisman Center; the result has been specialized curricula for parents and high school students to fill well-researched gaps in preparation for the world after graduation. Today the agency provides transition services in New Haven, Fairfield, and Hartford Counties in Connecticut; and Putnam County in New York.

Just one in five working-age Americans with a disability participates in the labor force, and among those who do, 8.4 percent were unemployed in August 2017—almost twice the national average for people without disabilities. For many people, we know this traces back to their first years out of school, when they failed to connect in a timely fashion to appropriate resources and enrolled instead for social services.

In 2012, the United States Government Accountability Office adequately captured the sentiment at hand in a report for the House of Representatives’ Committee on Education and the Workforce: “When young adults with disabilities do not successfully transition out of high school, they may face a lifetime of continued reliance on public assistance, potentially leading to substantial costs to the government and society.” ■



## Family Picnic!



## Ability Beyond Receives Technology Grant



Ability Beyond has received a \$10,000 grant investment from The Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities, to support a first-of-its-kind, peer-to-peer technology program called the TIP Squad. This program empowers people with disabilities to overcome everyday barriers to independence by using mainstream technology. The removing barriers to independence in everyday self-care and community inclusion.

With grant funding, Ability Beyond will host community workshops in Bethel, Conn., and Chappaqua, N.Y., to educate visitors about direct-care technology. The grant will also advance The Rights for People with Cognitive Disabilities to Technology and Information Access, a global declaration for equal rights of people with cognitive disabilities to technology and information access. You can read about and endorse the declaration at [www.colemaninstitute.org/declaration](http://www.colemaninstitute.org/declaration).

According to Shea Tanis, Associate Director of The Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities, “Technology expands and provides new opportunities for people with disabilities to become meaningful members of their communities. In our digital age access to technology can no longer be seen as a luxury but rather a necessity for inclusion. We are excited to partner with and support Ability Beyond in demonstrating the hope that access to technology and information has for people with cognitive disabilities.” ■

“As we pioneer technology solutions for people with disabilities, we are honored to have generous support from The Coleman Institute,” said Laurie Dale, senior leader of Empowering Technology at Ability Beyond. “Technology changes lives—and mainstream technology has incredible untapped potential to specifically empower people with limited mobility, verbal challenges and cognitive disabilities. Our TIP Squad gives the people we serve a true voice on the frontlines of advancing direct-care.”

The TIP Squad is an educational training program that Dale established in 2015, comprised of young adults with disabilities who research, assess, pilot, and implement mainstream technology into the lives of their peers with developmental and physical challenges. Today we have 10 interns who serve hundreds of individuals in Connecticut and New York; with grant funding, we will double the size of the TIP Squad.

Not only does the program bridge the gap to life-changing technology for people who face myriad barriers to independence, but it also creates a path for STEM training among young people with disabilities, who are underrepresented in the field. Our ultimate goal is to maximize—through mainstream technology, social inclusion, self-determination, and quality of life for this population.

The Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities works to catalyze and integrate advances in technology that promote the quality of life of people with cognitive disabilities and their families. Cognitive disabilities include; intellectual disability (ID), Alzheimer’s, brain injury, stroke, and serious, persistent mental illness. ■

## VETERAN ROLLS THE DICE: PEPSI ACT LAS VEGAS

It was April in Las Vegas, four months before the opening of Pepsi’s new facility, when I first met Juan Olivo while hosting an open house with the Wounded Warrior Project. Through his positive attitude and the firm handshake, I immediately knew Juan would make a great addition to any company if his background fit the position. Luckily for us both they did. Juan recently ended his time in the military after serving eleven years in the Army and the Air Force. At the time, he was serving at Fort Irwin Warrior Transition Unit for rehabilitation for injuries sustained while on deployment. Only a few months back to “civilian life” he already understood how difficult the transition could be.

“The main obstacle was just getting past the stigma of employers hiring veterans. So many see us (veterans) as a liability when considering us for a position and some veterans come back to civilian life with no education and just the training they received doing the job task assigned to them.”

Juan was working as a Warehouse Certifier, training recently released convicts in warehouse and job skills to better prepare them for the workforce. I could tell he was passionate about his position, but he was clearly underutilized after all the training and experience he received in the military. Juan reached out to the Wounded Warrior Project where he learned about the opportunity with Pepsi through their Pepsi ACT disability hiring initiative. In early June, Juan attended our Pepsi ACT Jobseeker Training two-day crash course to better prepare him for success.

“I spent eleven and a half years in the military and during that time I fell out of practice with basic interview skills and proper etiquette when presenting myself to prospective employers. The program got me where I needed to be to become successful,” Juan, remembers. The new Pepsi facility hosted an open house in July for all those interested, where Juan and other veterans with disabilities from Las Vegas based organizations, toured the facility, learned about the job opportunities and got the chance to speak with Pepsi’s management team.

In September 2017, Juan is celebrating his three-year anniversary with Pepsi as he continues to learn and looks forward to growing with the company.

As he looks back, he reminds his fellow veterans entering the workforce to “stay focused and stay the course. There will be roadblocks and you will stumble but there are opportunities still out there with employers who respect and appreciate what our veterans do.” Juan certainly knows staying focused and staying the course results in success. “I have been able to provide a quality of life for my family that I will forever be grateful for.” ■



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