

RISE REPORTER

MARCH 2021 | VOL. 45, NO. 1



Angela Yang learned much about a career in the floral industry through her work experience at a wholesale florist in Minneapolis. Read more on page 8.

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A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT & CEO LYNN NOREN

Welcome to 2021! We at Rise are all very excited to move into a new year that already shows many signs of moving beyond the pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic one year ago, we have worked closely with leadership at the Minnesota Department of Health and the Department of Human Services to guide safe service delivery. Many of our programs have continued to operate fully, using remote and other methods to connect and support the people we serve. Other services are gradually reopening, as state guidance allows. We cannot wait until we reach a time when everyone can access the services they want from Rise!

As we begin 2021, we are also focused on the Minnesota and Wisconsin legislatures once again. Unlike most businesses in Minnesota and Wisconsin, companies like Rise, which are funded with public dollars, must focus on advocating for legislative changes to our funding to ensure policies and funding are in place for services. We have established great relationships with our legislators and encourage them to partner with us in advocating for the programs and services that support the people we serve at Rise.

Throughout the pandemic, Rise has greatly benefited from resources made available through federal, state, and local agencies. Even though Rise had a significant drop in our revenues, these relief funds made a huge difference to get us through the past year. We will continue to work with legislative partners to ensure that public policies and funding are not reduced for the people we support.

Our legislative efforts, like everything we do at Rise, are accomplished working in partnership with state agencies, advocates, families, provider associations, and others to have a successful legislative session. You can follow Rise on Facebook or check out our rise.org website advocacy page to receive information about these legislative priorities throughout the session.

This year is Rise's 50th year of operation! We have so much to be proud of over the past five decades. We are grateful for the continual support from our community, a dedicated Board of Directors and staff team, and of course, the amazing accomplishments and encouragement we receive from the people we are so proud to serve every day that has made Rise successful for half a century! We will be hosting a number of celebrations later in the year when it is safe to do so---stay tuned for more information!



WHO WE ARE

Rise unlocks potential and opens doors to success for people with disabilities or other challenges through creative solutions and customized support. We envision a progressive, supportive, and collaborative environment that fosters meaningful growth and provides opportunities to live a life filled with purpose.

COVID UPDATES

For current information on Rise's services relative to the COVID-19 pandemic, please go to our website at rise.org and click on the *Updated Changes and Policies* banner on the home page. Stay safe. Be healthy.

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AT RISE

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Frontline workers are essential to keeping the public stocked, serviced, and supplied during COVID pandemic

thank you!

In the past year, we have seen thousands of heroic men and women working around the world to address the harrowing challenges thrust upon us all by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, we owe a debt of gratitude to health care workers, first responders, law enforcement, and teachers. But let us not take for granted or let the millions of other frontline workers go unappreciated as they are who enable us to keep our everyday lives going.

Meet some of those frontline workers whom Rise serves.

Laura Lecher - Walmart, Forest Lake

“Wearing a mask has been the biggest challenge for me with the pandemic because communicating is harder,” said Laura Lecher using American Sign Language (ASL). She works as a stocker at the Walmart in Forest Lake.

“Before the pandemic, I was able to read people’s lips and help people faster. But now with masks, it is a huge challenge. I rely more on writing notes and showing items. Sometimes I will show them the back of my vest which indicates I am Deaf. I then lead them to co-

workers who can help them.”

Laura says she is proud to be a frontline worker and help the community. “It is very important that people can still get things they need such as food and other essential items.”

Laura received career planning, job placement, and support services from Rise’s Minnesota Employment Center (MEC) for People Who are Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing.

Despite some challenges along the way, Laura was proud to reach her two-year anniversary in January.

“My favorite part of my job is interacting with coworkers and having some fun during the workday. I like interacting with customers and helping them with what they need.”

“Laura is a great Walmart employee and has been able to stay positive even during these very difficult times,” said Jody Gertken-Lomanto, an occupational communication specialist with MEC who provides follow-up support services as needed.



The message on Laura’s vest lets Walmart shoppers know she is Deaf and to tap her for assistance.



“There have been good things that happened for me during the pandemic,” Laura noted. “I became a grandma for the first time! In addition, I was able to transfer from the Walmart in Cambridge to Forest Lake and I really enjoy working in Forest Lake. We have received a little bonus from Walmart a few times due to working during the pandemic.”

Meet other frontline workers on pages 4 - 5

**Fred Hippchen,
Cub Foods, Minneapolis**

The temporarily tented Jerry's Cub Food store in South Minneapolis was a lifeline to its many customers when protesters and looters severely damaged its brick-and-mortar building following the death of George Floyd on Memorial Day 2020.

Erected in July in the parking lot, the "Community Market Lake Street," was in a culturally diverse, low- to moderate-income neighborhood. Cub employees worked hard to see that customers got what they needed.

Fred Hippchen worked there as a cashier and front-end team member from October to February. He then transferred to another Cub Foods in the Uptown neighborhood when the Community Market tent shut down and reopened in its building on February 10.

"We kept everything clean and safe for Cub employees and customers," said Fred. "I felt very comfortable working with a plexiglass shield at my register, having our temperatures taken frequently, everyone wearing masks, social distancing, and sanitizing."

Communicating with masks on was somewhat challenging, as English is not the first language of many of Cub's customers in the



Following the closing of the tented Jerry's Cub Food store, Fred transferred to another Cub store in Uptown Minneapolis

Lake Street neighborhood. The acoustics in the tent were also different than being in a building.

"I had to use a lot of hand gestures and reading their wonderfully expressive eyes to converse with people and answer their questions," said Fred. "But we all made it work."

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, the Minnesota Twins' baseball season came to a halt, Fred's bartending job at Target Field in downtown Minneapolis came to a halt, too.

"So I worked with [Rise Employment Consultant] Kim Aldahl who helped me update my resume, conduct a job search, and apply for jobs online," said Fred. "I really

needed her assistance as I'm not that tech savvy."

Working for Cub Foods is a job this outgoing, friendly guy really enjoys. Going back to work was important to Fred, who has had Major Depressive Disorder for more than 35 years.

"Working is an important part of my self-care to avoid isolation," he noted.

"Customer service work fits my personality and I really enjoy the public interaction. I feel so much better working with people."

Ironically, the day after Fred found out that he was not one of those lucky Minnesotans to be selected in the vaccine lottery, he received a call from his HCMC clinic to schedule his shots.

Frontline workers are essential! Rise is proud to support those working in community businesses and help ensure their success, health, and safety.

Robert Kreitz, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Chisago City

As a delivery driver for O'Reilly's Auto Parts in Chisago City, Robert Kreitz is proud that by bringing parts to auto mechanic shops, he's helping get people back on the road.

"It seems like it's been busier during the pandemic than at other times," said Robert who has worked at O'Reilly's for two years. "I am required to wear a mask in the shops I deliver to and at O'Reilly's to help keep myself and others safe. I also sanitize the computers and card readers."

Robert said that he feels his work is essential. "Wearing a mask and doing extra cleaning doesn't hamper me in my job.

"I think I'm a good employee and am willing to work extra shifts if they need me to," he added.

Robert has received career planning, job placement, and follow-up support services from Employment Consultant Michelle Thompson from Rise Lindstrom for the past four years.



Kevin Stignani, Kwik Trip, Chisago City

Kevin Stignani has worked as a retail helper with the Kwik Trip in Chisago City for the past 14 months.

A dedicated employee who always arrives early for his shift, Kevin works safely by wearing a mask, social distancing, and sanitizing equipment. Kevin is proud of the work he does, and even in a cold Minnesota winter, especially enjoys getting to work outside and assisting customers.

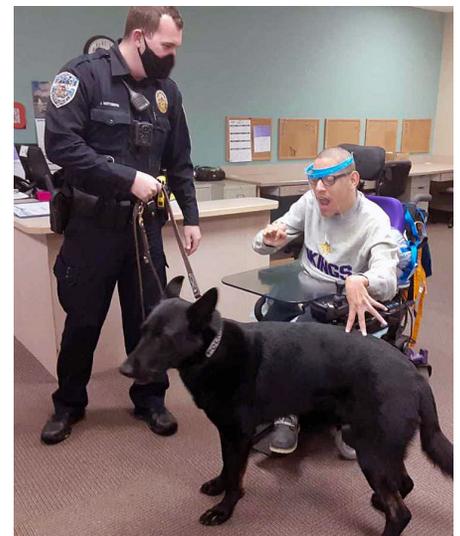
Kevin has received Rise career planning, job placement, and follow-up support services. Employment Consultant Michelle Thompson meets with him regularly to help ensure his continued success on the job.

Visit from police officer and his service dog a day-brightener at Rise Anoka

JORDAN HALLIGAN IS NOT ONLY a big Vikings fan (as evidenced by his sweatshirt), but enjoys anything related to police work and law enforcement. Recently, he was excited to meet Officer J. Sorteberg from the City of Anoka Police Department who came to Rise Anoka with his four-year-old German Shepherd police dog, Bravo.

"Officer Sorteberg was very kind and we enjoyed the time he took with us," said Program Supervisor Kim Devore. "Jordan often listens to a police scanner to hear about things going on around him, and sometimes describes how he would have responded in various situations if he was a policeman."

On the afternoon of February 21, Bravo was shot in the line of duty while working with his fellow police officers to apprehend two thieves. He was operated on and we all wish him a speedy and healthy recovery. Everyone at Rise Anoka hopes they will come back again soon to visit.



Robert rebuilds life after near-fatal motorcycle accident; proud of his good work at County Market in Hudson

“ROBERT, COULD YOU please hand me that jar of honey on the top shelf?” a customer asked. “If I don’t come home with the right brand, my wife won’t let me in the door!” he added with a laugh.

Most of the customers at Jerry’s County Market in Hudson, Wis., know Robert Radtke by name and he knows them. The polite, outgoing stocker has been assisting people shop for more than six years and is happy to offer people help as he keeps the grocery shelves filled and faced, and the aisles clear.

Robert suffered a traumatic brain injury at the age of 19 as the result of a motorcycle accident when he hit a deer. He spent almost 16 weeks in a coma and had to relearn to do almost everything.

“It took me years to learn how to walk again,” said Robert who is now 36 and prides himself on being on a regular schedule of fitness and exercise.

Once recovered, he entered the workforce at Rise New Richmond

where Robert worked on a wide range of production subcontracts. When a Rise team member asked him if he was interested in working at a job in the community, Robert jumped at the opportunity.

Because of his brain injury, Robert has devised his own system of remembering where items are located in the store so that he can answer customers’ questions and provide them with great service.

“Coffee starts with ‘C’ and that is the third letter in the alphabet so coffee is in Aisle 3,” Robert explained. “Bread starts with ‘B’ so that’s in Aisle 2 because B is the second letter. Pizza has two Z’s in it and a Z has four points, so pizza sauce is in Aisle 4.

“But what I usually say to a customer who asks me where something is, is ‘Follow me!’ and I take them right to it!”

No wonder so many customers enjoy chatting with him as they make their way through the store. Robert also has earned the respect from and enjoys the friendships of his Country Market co-workers.

“I have had the privilege and honor of working with Robert his whole time here,” said Grocery Manager Chad Weiland. “From

Follow-Up Support Specialist Kim Ersland checks in with Robert on a regular basis at the County Market in Hudson.



day one, I knew he was someone special, and exactly what this store needed. He has a positive, friendly energy that is simply unmatched. When I take my three children shopping, they always ask me to ‘find Candy Bob!’ as he is known by everyone here, so they can get a fist bump. He always makes the time to get a smile out of people. We are very lucky to have Candy Bob in our County Market family.”

Follow-Up Support Specialist Kim Ersland visits Robert twice a week to help ensure all goes well on the job. “He has his own fan club,” she noted.

“I could have a ‘pity party,’ I guess, but I won’t because I am so blessed,” said Robert with conviction.

In his free time, he enjoys playing board games and cards with his four young nephews.





When pandemic hit, Larry regroups and lands 'dream job'

IF THIS MAN'S FRIENDLY face looks familiar, you may recognize him from a *Rise Reporter* feature in the March 2020 issue.

OR -- you may have asked him for directions in downtown Minneapolis and had him escort you to your destination.

Larry Mitchell works as an 'ambassador' with the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District (DID) and says he enjoys "bringing more happiness to the streets of downtown Minneapolis."

With assistance from Rise Employment Consultant Hollie Petersen, Larry had been working as a general utility worker for Aramark, a food service caterer, at US Bank Stadium.

When the pandemic hit last year, events at the stadium came to a screeching halt and Larry was laid off. So he turned his sights on getting a job with DID.

Larry and Hollie visited the DID office in March 2020 to learn about upcoming opportunities. Unfortunately, the pandemic postponed DID's hiring season.

"Larry was persistent in making sure DID knew who he was and connected with employees to find out when applications would be open again," Hollie remembers.

"He continued to check in monthly until the last week of July when we finally got the word to move forward with submitting his application! Larry first had a virtual interview, and then an in-person interview in July (following COVID-19 guidelines) to complete



the process."

Wendy Yang, his Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services counselor, continued her support of Larry by providing funds to purchase waterproof boots, insoles, and winter socks.

Larry was hired in August 2020 and works Friday through Tuesday helping clean downtown streets and sidewalks, emptying trash cans, and keeping corners and walkways free of snow and ice for pedestrians' safety.

But Larry says the very best part of his job is the hospitality he extends to visitors and residents.

"I enjoy answering their questions, giving people directions, and escorting them to places, if they want," said Larry, who is known for his kind demeanor, strong work ethic, and willingness to help others.

"Downtown Minneapolis isn't

as busy as it used to be, but I like living and working here."

"Larry is such a dedicated individual, and has always been exciting to work with!" said Hollie. "Now that we are focused on maintaining his current job, rather than job-seeking, Larry continues to check in weekly – whether we are processing concerns or celebrating his successes. It has been incredible to see Larry take a vision and turn it into his own

reality. I am so proud of how far he has come!"

Larry, who is 61, has faced significant personal obstacles in life. He appreciates the continued support he receives from Hollie. Given his life experiences, Larry wants to help others who may also be struggling with mental health issues.

"Larry does not hesitate to spread the word about his positive experience connecting with mental health and employment services," Hollie added. "His current role is a great outlet for him to make a positive daily impact on individuals in his own community, as well as demonstrate to tourists the true hospitality of Minneapolis."

"For those of us who come from the streets and have our ups and downs in life, it's important not to let our past hinder our future," Larry said. "Don't let failure get in your way – never stop trying."

Students benefit from community work experiences

OUTSIDE THE temperature hovered around zero, but inside, it was nice and warm and smelled like a tropical garden with fresh cuts, arrangements, bouquets, and plants throughout the expansive distribution site.

Hoping to one day have a career in the floral industry, Angela Yang was excited to get valuable hands-on work experience at one of the Upper Midwest's premier wholesale florists in Minneapolis.

From the time, we were young, we have likely been asked the age-old question: *What do you want to be when you grow up?*

Some of us have always had a ready answer and a clear path toward that career goal; others need time to explore, experience, and examine the many choices available.

For youth who have significant

barriers to employment, career planning may be challenging. Rise is among agencies in the state now offering Pre-Employment Transition Services (or Pre-ETS) to students who are referred by their school district, State Services for the Blind, or Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Pre-ETS is mandated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (or WIOA), which was signed into law in 2014.

This federal legislation is designed to strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers as well as help employers hire and retain skilled workers.

With plants coming in from around the world, Angela carefully

unpackaged, sorted, and distributed plants to various display areas so that sales representatives could visually assess plant availability for their customers. Her favorite plants were the tropical ones; she also loves tulips and lilies.

Quietly and methodically, Angela went about her work two days a week, learning not only valuable floral industry work skills, but equally valuable "soft skills" that employers expect in an employee.

Rise Employment Consultant Amber Barnes provided one-on-one job coaching until Angela caught on to all her job duties. Weekly check-in visits provided additional support to help ensure that Angela made the most of her six-week work experience there.

"Angela is a hard worker and was a tremendous help to the florist staff," said Amber. "She caught on right away, and was steadfast and focused on her work. We are exploring additional work experiences at other local florists."

Students can work in a Pre-ETS position for up to 120 hours, although if requested, this can be extended. They may also have multiple work experiences in different industries to truly get a better idea of what kind of job for which they are best suited.

In addition to valuable work experiences, students have access to four other activities which will help ensure their long-term success in the workforce, including job exploration counseling, counseling on postsecondary education





which hone their skills and aid in career planning



Latrice has had other work experiences, including at a flower shop and a seniors' residence where she helped people with feeding, personal care, and mobility. She hopes to someday have a career either as a baker or teacher.

LaCreche Executive Director Phyllis Sloan has helped make her work experience a robust opportunity by allowing Latrice to rotate through all of the center's classes and programs. The young woman says she has enjoyed learning to care for infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, and school-age students who are doing distance learning there.

"I like getting to know each of the kids, what they like to do, and how I can help them," said Latrice. "I am nice to them, but have to be responsible and firm so they listen to me."

As an employer with many professional child care and teaching staff, Phyllis recognizes the impor-

tance of training people in both hard and soft skills so they can develop into a well-rounded, competent employee.

A student in Anoka-Hennepin District 11's Bridges program, Jean Achicha recently completed a work experience at Jerry's Do It Best Hardware Store in Ramsey, and then moved on to another at Coborn's Superstore also in Ramsey.

Amber works with Heather Henry and other job coaches from District #11 to help Jean train in on his job duties.

Both work experiences will help give Jean, who is 19, valuable insight into retail positions as he continues to explore various industries and develop a career plan for his future.

"We appreciate the many local businesses and employers who have partnered with Rise so we can offer these valuable work experience opportunities to young adults," said Robert. "They provide students with critical information for their career planning."

options, work readiness skills, and self-advocacy.

"Our initial plans for a Pre-ETS rollout across Rise's Minnesota service areas were slowed down somewhat due to the onset of COVID when schools switched to hybrid and distance learning," said Senior Director of Vocational Services Robert Reedy.

"This made identifying students who could best benefit from Pre-ETS and coordinate their work experiences more challenging, but we are excited now to join with other service providers to offer these critical services to young adults to assist them in their career planning."

Latrice Sinclair, 19, has been working three days a week as a teacher's aide at the LaCreche Early Childhood Centers, Inc. in Minneapolis since October; she attends Transition Plus in South Minneapolis the other two days.



Jean Achicha recently completed a work experience at Jerry's Do It Best Hardware Store in Ramsey and will do others as he develops his career plans.

New town, new career field gives Ray hope for the future

AFTER FACING SOME difficult and challenging times in his home state of Tennessee, Ray Joyce decided to make a big move northward to Minneapolis in March 2020 to get a fresh start.

And then the pandemic hit -- rocking everyone's world, including Ray's.

Without a job or a place to live, Ray went to Harbor Light Center in downtown Minneapolis. Operated by the Salvation Army, this safe place offers people a wide range of services to help them stabilize their lives.

While living at Harbor Light, Ray was referred to Park Avenue for three months and then after, to the Life Rebuilders program of transitional housing and support programming, where he lived until December 2020.

Pauline Shimada-Hayward, a senior social worker with Hennepin Health, began meeting with Ray to help determine the services he would need to get a good start in his new town. She matched him up with a mental health therapist and medical doctor.

"I can't thank Pauline enough for connecting me to all the programs and resources I have received with her help," said Ray.

In addition, Pauline referred Ray to Rise Employment Consultant Jennifer Wiza for career planning, job placement, and follow-up support services.

After years of working in maintenance and construction jobs, the 52-year-old Ray decided he wanted



ed to change career fields.

"I really wanted to work with and care for people by getting my certified nursing assistant's license," said Ray.

"He was really driven to make it all work," said Jen. "We spent most of the summer researching how Ray could earn his nursing assistance certification (CNA), looking for job opportunities, and updating his resume to better reflect his tremendous 'people skills,' strong work ethic, and passion to help others."

Ray was hired by Benedictine Living Community-Minneapolis in August. Still working on getting his CNA certification, he helps bathe, feed, and care for the senior residents.

Since he doesn't have a car and

relies on public transportation, Jen assisted Ray in finding long-term housing within walking distance of work, shopping, and his church.

Prior to moving, Ray was getting up at 3 a.m. to take two buses to work. Now that he's much closer, he can "sleep in" until 4:15 a.m. to punch in for his eight-hour shift.

"Living out in the country, hard work was part of everyday life; it feels good to be able to take care of your family and yourself," said Ray, a man of deep and abiding faith. "But all of us need help sometimes, and I am so grateful to Jen and Pauline,

and my doctors for helping me navigate through all these big changes that I've made."

His supervisors at Benedictine appreciate his good work. "One of them wanted to know if I had ever thought of becoming a nurse, so evidently, I'm doing real good!" Ray added.

His supervisor, Steve, says, "Since joining the team, Ray has been blowing us out of the water with his great attitude, warm heart, and caring actions."

"I was raised to care about people -- I love people and I love my job. I never thought that I could do this kind of work. I can look into people's eyes to connect with them and understand what they need. God has put me right where He wants me to be."

Rise Oakdale team provides HIPERFIRE with dependable, high-quality workmanship

ADIRIROW OJULU may be a man of few words, but he knows how to pick the right radio station to keep his team members from Rise Oakdale humming while they work at HIPERFIRE in Vadnais Heights. Today it's country music which lifts everyone spirits on this bitter cold Minnesota winter day.

With Employment Specialist Bob Kenney supervising, the team of four daily kits about 300 component packages and assembles triggers for high-end firearms used worldwide by competitive shooters, hunters, law enforcement, and the U.S. military.

Co-owner and vice president of operations, Nate Rinehart, also sends subassembly and packaging projects to Rise Oakdale's production facility. Since 2015, HIPERFIRE has relied solely on Rise workers to complement their production demands



The Rise team consists of six people who rotate working at HIPERFIRE so there are always four people on site; Tom Ammerman works on HIPERFIRE projects at Rose Oakdale.

"As a small business, I value the work Rise employees do for us," said Nate. "I set up the process to follow and Bob manages the team. There are at least 26 assembly projects which require keen attention to detail. Our company's reputation is directly related to the work Rise completes because that is what our customers receive.

The Rise team is enthusiastic about the work they do and support each other by working together like a 'well-oiled machine.'

"Not only are their quality and production rates outstanding, but Rise is flexible with staffing so we can easily expand or contract the number of workers to meet our production needs. They are a perfect fit for our company. Everyone, from management to the workers, are profes-

Rumor has it that Charlie Rea is faster at assembling triggers than Co-Owner Nate Rinehart! Regardless, Nate appreciates Charlie and the team's great work.



From left are DSP Bob Kenney, Hannah, Jennifer Morgan, and Adirirow Ojulu. In the back are Co-Owner Nate Rinehart and Charlie Rea. Not pictured are Maria Jungman and Tom Ammerman.

sional and committed to helping us achieve our goals. They are an extension of our company."

Nate and his partners are proud that 100 percent of the parts they use in their products are made in the U.S., and about 90 percent are manufactured right here in Minnesota.

"HIPERFIRE is committed to supporting our local community, hence our partnership with Rise," Nate added.

"It's always a pleasure working with HIPERFIRE," said Program Supervisor Nicole Burdick. "They have been amazing working with us through the pandemic, ensuring that everyone's needs are met and people can work safely."

Proud of their important role, the Rise workers enjoy holiday parties, pizza lunches, and other expressions of appreciation from Nate and the HIPERFIRE team.

Art Speaks sessions continue in-person and remotely

EXPRESSING ONESELF through art has been not only fun, but therapeutic for many people during the pandemic.

Rise Art Therapist Stacy Gross has found creative ways to enable people who are both receiving services at a Rise location as well as remotely from home to continue with their artistic endeavors.

“Some people at home choose their own art project to work on remotely and others join in the projects we are doing at a Rise location,” said Stacy. “I mail people supplies or drop them off at their homes so they have what they need to join in with others during a regular art session.”

Rise’s Art Speaks program complements other therapeutic and rehabilitative services people receive.



Heather Barber is a prolific artist whose original works have been on display in many exhibits throughout the Twin Cities. Here, she paints with acrylics at Rise Crystal with support from Art Therapist Stacy Gross.

Stacy guides them and encourages them to speak out through different art media.

“Creating art provides opportunities for self-expression and fostering one’s self-esteem,” said Stacy. “Through art groups and exhibitions, our artists experience the chance to find their voice and share it with others. Creating art also helps people relax and reduces anxiety, especially during these most unusual times.”

Depending on people’s interests and requests, Art Speaks sessions may take on different formats.

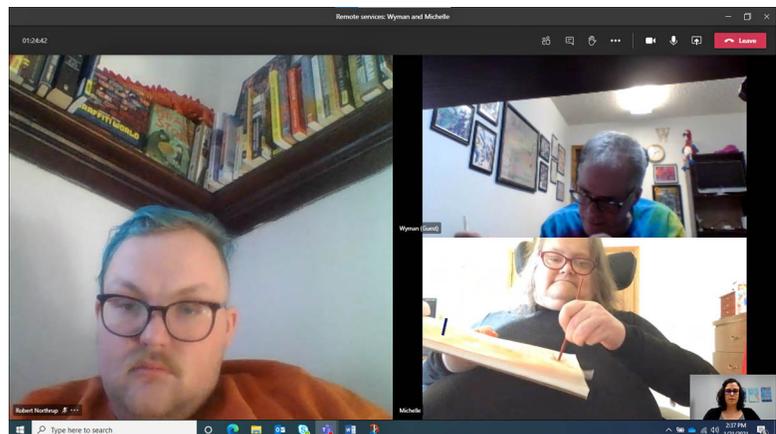
“Some people enjoy telling me what to do as I am making the art!” Stacy explained. “Other times, I create something and we talk about the process and what I am doing. We listen to music and talk about art. It’s nice to do multi-sensory art for those who aren’t necessarily as verbal or would prefer to relax while others paint or draw.”

Recently, VOYA Financial in Minneapolis generously donated



Tracy Bird is excited and grateful to receive art supplies sent to her home. She wanted people to know she was smiling behind her mask. ~ Yes, Tracy, we can see your big smile in your eyes!

books of specialty paper and sets of paint which their employees put together into 25 sets that Stacy gives out to people doing remote services.



Top and bottom right, Wyman Groenke and Michelle Flannery join in Art Speaks from home. Remote Services Case Manager Robert Northrup often joins in, too.



Rise's 2020 Excellence in Leadership honorees exemplify outstanding professionalism, dedication to mission

RISE IS PROUD TO HAVE the best and the brightest professionals on our team carrying out our important mission. Here are three exceptional managers who were recognized in our 2020 *Excellence in Leadership* awardees.

Rachel Meyer, *program supervisor at Rise Cottage Grove*

Rachel is a great team leader and always goes the extra mile to ensure the team at Rise Cottage Grove has what they need to best serve each and every person there. Rachel's co-workers find her to be a great listener who addresses their concerns and embraces their good ideas by putting them into action.

Her team members appreciate her unwavering support and respond by always doing the very best work they can.

With input from her great team, Rachel creates community volunteer opportunities for people, develops new activities to address people's specific interests and likes, and implements chang-



es when necessary to improve and enhance services.

Best of all, say her team members, Rachel makes them feel appreciated on a daily basis. Even her simple "Great job!" goes a long way to enhance their feeling of pride in the important work they do and creates an atmosphere of cohesive teamwork.



Danielle Oestreicher, *program manager at Rise Coon Rapids*

Danielle executes Rise's *Standards of Excellence* every day and leads by example. She is an excellent teacher, mentor, and source of support.

Danielle builds and maintains a positive, effective work environment for her team and encourages them to always strive for excellence. "We know that as a team, we can accomplish anything," they say.



John Watters, *program manager at Rise New Richmond*

John is well-respected by all his Rise New Richmond team members because he leads in ways that always includes others' concerns and ideas. He shows them respect and support.

"Our voices are never ignored," say members of his hard-working team.

John helps create a positive and enjoyable work environment. With his calm demeanor, John reacts positively and finds a solution even in challenging situations. His genuine kindness, humor, and zest for life are contagious.

John is always exploring new ways to encourage people to meet their goals by offering customized choices and opportunities. The end result is often that what may have once been deemed impossible is now attainable.

Congratulations and thank you to Rachel, Danielle, and John.

Interns bring passion, skills, and drive to their work at

Cassidy Bins

Cassidy Bins served as Rise's grant writing intern this fall. An English major with a minor in history, Cassidy will graduate from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, in 2022.

Over the course of her internship, Cassidy assisted in the preparation of grant applications in support of Rise's various programs. She interviewed program managers and drafted language about the pandemic's impact on Rise for use in future applications, which allowed her to learn more about Rise's operations.

"I'm most proud of the project proposal I wrote with the help of Rise's Grant Manager Nicole Conti to fund memberships at area community centers for people with disabilities," she said.

"I learned so much about the grant writing process, and my time with Rise has only reinforced my desire to pursue a career where I can help people."



Paige Cihunka

Paige Cihunka will graduate from Winona State University in May 2021 with a degree in human resource management and business administration. "I have always wanted to work for an organization that works with helping people and the community," said Paige.

As a Rise intern, Paige created her own training program on inclusive hiring within the workplace for managers to use. "It taught me so much about the hiring process and how important it is for organizations to inclusively hire to create a welcoming and diverse environment," she said.

Paige was also part of the open enrollment process and worked on various day-to-day HR tasks, including creating a social media consent form and job flyers, working on job postings, and more.

After graduation, Paige hopes to find a job within the HR field. "This internship will greatly benefit me as I continue my aspirations

into the HR community."

She will continue to work with Rise's HR team in the spring. "They made the internship fun, engaging, and created a positive learning environment for me," said Paige.

Grace LaNasa

Despite the many challenges posed by the pandemic during the fall semester, Grace LaNasa found her internship with Rise to be rewarding. Grace will graduate from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, in May 2021, where she is majoring in history and Asian studies with a concentration in film studies.

Her passion for volunteering made her internship with Rise's Advancement team a good fit as she worked on a number of projects that involved managing volunteer hours, creating flyers announcing special promotions for volunteers, and researching different volunteer opportunities.

"I learned so much more about the administrative sides of non-profit work during my time with Rise," Grace added.





Rise; appreciate their fine efforts on important projects



Elizabeth Trainor

Elizabeth Trainor first interned with Rise's Human Resources department in 2019, and was excited to return this fall as the health and wellness intern. She will graduate from North Dakota State University in May 2021 with a major in human resource management and a minor in women's and gender studies.

"I loved Rise's work environment and learning from all of my co-workers and supervisors who always gave me room to grow," Elizabeth said. "I was excited to come back, learn more, and contribute to Rise."

As an intern, Elizabeth researched information on a wide range of health and wellness topics that were sent out in weekly emails.

"I work really hard to create and share content that helped raise awareness of it and encouraged everyone to be more intentional about their health. I got to be involved in a lot more of the day-to-day tasks and overarching projects

that the HR team works on."

She credits her supervisors and members of the HR team for sharing advice, support, and resources. Elizabeth hopes she provided employees with a positive, progress-oriented information that will help them to work toward better health in all aspects of their lives.

Tynslei Spence-Mitchell

Tynslei Spence-Mitchell wanted to explore a career in the non-profit sector, and over the course of her internship, she contributed to Rise's diversity and inclusion efforts. A doctoral candidate in public administration at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, Tynslei will graduate in May 2021.

As an intern, Tynslei created trainings, targeted employee retention models, and developed a standardized set of guidelines for Rise's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. She also created and issued diversity notifications on behalf of Rise celebrating religious, cultural, and federal holidays.

"I am most proud of the inclusion assessment that I conducted early on in my internship," said



Tynslei. "It helped me evaluate the most effective methods to connect all levels of employees, whether working remotely or in person"

Tynslei was integral to Rise's launch of 'Connected Thursdays,' an area on Microsoft Teams where employees are able to learn more about one another. "Many employees seem to be receptive to connecting with one another in this forum, and I hope that it is the first of many that I am able to help implement.

"My internship at Rise taught me how to apply my existing research to strategic planning and overall organizational goals. I believe that that will assist me in my career long-term."

***Interested in an internship at Rise?
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