



Spring Connections

Welcome to the spring 2025 edition of Connections! This newsletter contains updates from each of our departments, including Residential Services, Quality Assurance, Day Services, and Support Services. Also, we will hear an important message from our CEO, Michael Planz.

We also wanted to highlight some important events that have happened here at Community Living recently. First, we welcome our newest person to Community Living, Wayne. Next, a piece from Matt's Tech Corner about password best practices and a CQL Update from Quality Assurance. Meaningful Day Services recognizes Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. We hear from Carlota in Support Services, including a dedication to Rick Fuss and a winter activity recap. Lastly, we also wanted to call attention to the budget cuts that have been announced in Maryland and the advocacy people here at CLI have been dedicated about.

If you're interested in learning more about these amazing happenings, then keep reading!



A Message from our CEO Michael Planz

Short and Sweet. Anyone who supports a person with a developmental disability – whether a parent, family member, or direct support professional, paid or unpaid, full or part time – knows what goes into that role. And if you are a family member who has trusted the care of your loved one to a provider organization like Community Living, you know the difference quality, consistent Direct Support Professionals make. Over the past several years, the advocacy from all of you and from self-advocates has led to the realization that provider organizations must be compensated fairly in order to recruit and retain high quality staff. Over the past several years, that is what has happened. Community Living has achieved unprecedented staffing levels, which has led to enhanced quality as reflected in licensing reviews, regulatory oversight, and nationally recognized accreditation. We have enhanced our Quality Assurance department, and they are out every day making sure our standards are upheld. We have been able to upgrade our fleet of vehicles so people we support, and our staff, can drive around in safe, reliable vehicles. We have been able to give staff the wages and benefits they deserve. Most importantly, we have been able to ensure people we support are living lives that are meaningful to them, see for yourself at @clifrederick on Facebook and Instagram.





Use your Voice!



Unfortunately, the current fiscal crisis in the state threatens to undo all of that. The governor's budget proposed cutting \$457 million from the DDA budget in the next fiscal year. The cuts have the potential to undo the progress we have made over the past several years, leading to diminished services for some and no services for others. I have reached out to Community Living's supporters several times already, and many of you have stepped up! For that I say, "THANK YOU!"

The fight is not over! The budget is still in limbo, we and other providers don't know where things will land. It's not too late for you – if you value the work Community Living does for 150 people every day – see page 9 on how to take action.

–Michael Planz



Residential



*Welcome
Wayne!*

From all of us at
Community Living, Inc.
We're so glad you're here!



Spring is just around the corner, and the residential department is ready to roll! We have plans for all kinds of local sporting events, theaters, concerts – you name it – we are going to it!

We also have a newcomer to the residential department and are so excited to get to know Wayne! Wayne began receiving residential services on the 25th of February. We're not sure who is more excited about this adventure - him or us! Welcome Wayne!



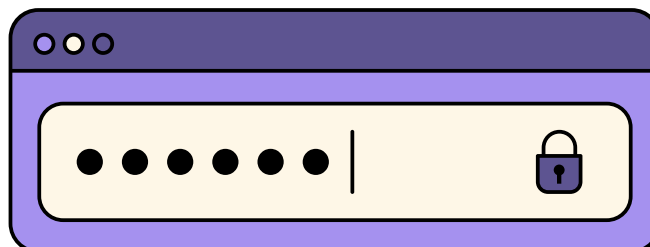
Quality Assurance

Tech Corner

Strengthening Your Security: Password Best Practices & MFA

In today's digital world, strong passwords are the first line of defense against cyber threats. A good password should be at least 12 characters long and include a mix of uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols. Avoid common words, personal information, or predictable patterns like "123456" or "password." Instead, use passphrases—longer, easy-to-remember combinations of random words (e.g., "BlueTiger\$7OceanSkate"). Additionally, avoid reusing passwords across multiple sites; a breach on one platform could compromise all your accounts. Using a password manager can help you generate and store strong, unique passwords without the hassle of remembering them all.

Beyond strong passwords, multi-factor authentication (MFA) adds an essential layer of security. MFA requires users to verify their identity with something they know (password) and something they have (a mobile app, security key, or SMS code). Even if an attacker steals your password, they won't be able to access your account without the second factor. Enabling MFA significantly reduces the risk of unauthorized access and should be used on all accounts that support it, especially email, banking, and work-related platforms.





Quality Assurance

CQL Update



Recently, we had the pleasure of welcoming The Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) back to Community Living Inc. for a follow-up visit regarding our Quality Assurance Accreditation. This visit provided an opportunity for them to check in on our progress, see what's changed, and hear directly from the people who make CLI what it is—our staff and those we support.

The CQL reviewer sat down with our QA team and CEO, Michael Planz, to go over the progress we've made in the past 18 months. And let's just say, they were really impressed! From policy updates and enhanced trainings to our work with Personal Outcome Measures (POM) interviews, there has been a lot of positive change. More importantly, these improvements are helping us provide even better support to the people in our programs.

But what really made this visit special was the conversations. The reviewer met with staff and people supported from our residential homes, meaningful day program, and personal support services, hearing firsthand about their experiences. When asked about day services, one person said, "We go out to all different places. We go to the movies, bingo, bowling, library—all over every day."

At the end of the visit, the reviewer shared how much she appreciated the hard work and dedication of everyone at CLI. And honestly, we couldn't agree more. This follow-up was a reminder of how far we've come—and how much we're capable of. We're so grateful for our amazing staff and the people we support, and we're excited to keep growing together!

The next step in the accreditation process is to continue the work we have been doing these past 18 months. The QA department have already started conducting POM interviews with the people we support. These interviews provide valuable insights into what CLI has been doing well, areas for improvement, and the goals and desires of the people we serve.

Lastly, accreditations follow a three-year cycle, and ours continues until July 2026. We will be applying for re-accreditation to maintain and further enhance the care and services we provide.



Meaningful Day Services



Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Every March, the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities recognizes and celebrates Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. We are proud of how Meaningful Day Services (and CLI as a whole), acknowledges the importance of inclusion in creating richer lives for those we support and in building a stronger community overall. As you are out and about in Frederick County, you may see people we support working at your grocery store, bowling at the local lanes, serving coffee at a coffee house, catching a movie at a theater with friends, planting vegetables in a community garden, volunteering at a thrift shop, working out at Planet Fitness, or participating in a number of other activities in our community. Let us continue to embrace inclusion and recognize the value of each person, as we work together to create a more vibrant and connected community for all. Thank you to our amazing staff for all that they do to enrich the lives of others!





Support Services



Rick Fuss

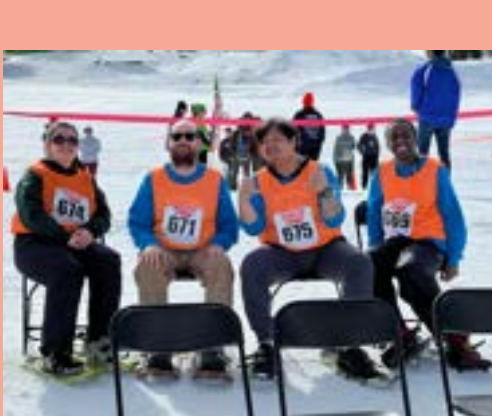
We dedicate this part of our connections newsletter in honor of Rick Fuss.

Rick was an active member of the support services team for many years. Rick passed away on 2/25/25 after a long illness. We will always remember his love and dedication and his attitude of making things happen. Rick encouraged and guided a young man, Timmy, to become more independent and advocate for himself, “do what you can and what you want to do.” Rick was instrumental in assisting this young man to fulfilling a lifelong dream, owning a car.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to Rick's family and friends, especially his wife Donna and his son Greg.

Winter Activities

We thoroughly enjoyed this winter season — we ventured outdoor and indoors. Bowling, basketball and snowshoeing adventures kept us busy as athletes, as well as shows, plays, the gym and sporting events and of course winter cleaning and daily routines. David and his unified bowling partner, Lisa, went to Baton Rouge for a 4-day bowling national invitational bowling tournament, had a great time, and came back with a gold medal. The basketball team has gone as far as St. Mary's college in Southern Maryland for a qualifier. Snowshoeing took us to Whitetail Ski Resort in Mercersburg, PA and to Wisp Resort in McHenry, MD for the Winter Games, a fabulous 3-day event. As we reflect on the exciting and active winter season, we are filled with pride for the dedication and achievements of all involved, and we look forward to even more adventures and successes in the seasons to come.





Maryland Budget Crisis and our Trips to Annapolis



As many of you may know, due to Maryland's budget crisis, cuts to the DDA budget have been proposed. As discussions continue about the hundreds of millions of dollars in proposed budget cuts, our advocates are speaking up and making their voices heard!

We attended a Senate budget hearing, DD Day, and the Save Our DD Services Rally in Annapolis. We listened to testimonials about how these services will impact the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families, and the organizations that provide support.

Some of the areas impacted include a decrease in dedicated hours for residential housing, county-specific differential rates, suspension of the LISS program, and a reduction in self-directed services.

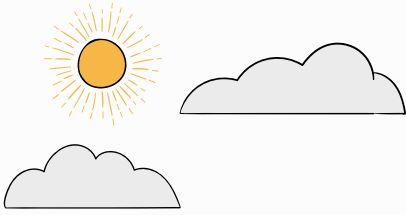
These cuts could have a devastating impact on people with disabilities and the services they rely on. We've been speaking up, but we also need your voices to make a difference! Contact your state representatives and share your story about how these cuts would affect you or someone you know. Let them know you oppose these cuts and are concerned about their impact on what you find important about Community Living.

Find your state representative here:

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Members/District>

Every voice matters in this fight. Help support people with disabilities. Let's stand together to protect our community!





Connect and Stay in Touch with us!



Community Living, Inc. (CLI) is a nonprofit that provides supports and services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

To learn more about CLI and what we do, visit <https://communitylivinginc.org>



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and family



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