

# HOME & COMMUNITY OPTIONS



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

*Respecting differences. Creating opportunities. Achieving independence.*

# MANAGEMENT



## **Executive Director**

Suzanne Horstman

## **Program Services Directors**

Abigail Jackson

Cindi Wiczek

Mary Jansen

*Retiring 2021*

Kathy Murck

*Retiring 2021*

## **Director of Licensing and Policy**

Keri Cada

## **Director of Health Services**

Joette Gillett

## **Director of Finance**

Maureen Schauble

*In March of 2021, Program Services Director, **Paula Krage**, retired from Home and Community Options. Thank you, Paula, for the past 37 years working to support the mission and work of our agency.*

## MISSION

to provide support and residential services to people with developmental disabilities, enabling them to live as full members of the community.

## VISION

for all individuals to have opportunities to enjoy life, strive to reach their full potential, and be accepted members of the community.

## CORE VALUES

Respect for all people and their differences.

Quality services that balance independence with safety and security.

The ability of all individuals to learn, build relationships, and enjoy life.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### PRESIDENT

Robert Youngerman

### VICE PRESIDENT

Laurel Kruse

### SECRETARY

Marisa Corcoran

### TREASURER

Bruce Nelson

Kelly Borck  
Brittani Burt  
John Collins  
Randy Domeyer  
Michael Hagarty  
Gary Luehmann  
Jonelle Moore  
Jan Mosher  
Eva Pampuch  
Mary Stoltman  
Lynn Theurer

*Thank you to **Bridget Klinger, Laurie Ziliak, and Mark Zimmerman** for their years serving on the HCO Board!*

*Bridget, Laurie, and Mark retired at the end of 2020.*

## SHARON KANNENBERG COMMITTEE

Marisa Corcoran  
Geri Corey  
Eric Decker  
Terri Kersting  
Jonelle Moore  
Wayne Shustrom



# BOARD AND EXECUTIVE MESSAGE



**Suzanne Horstman**  
Executive Director



**Robert Youngerman**  
Board President

***“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”***

- Socrates

We can all agree that 2020 was an unusual year - full of changes in both our personal and professional lives. Early on, HCO decided to use this time of great transformation in our society to take advantage of the positive changes that were presented to us. So, while it was a year of substantial challenges for us all, it was also a year of opportunities for us at HCO. The pandemic has unexpectedly provided:

### Opportunities to interact with our community in new and meaningful ways

Over the past year, we have been immensely grateful for the community that we live in and those that have embraced and supported us (and each other) over the past year. Through our video series, “The Show Must Go On,” HCO was able to give our community members a peek behind the curtain of what putting on our yearly musical entails, sharing stories and experiences from key leaders, volunteers, cast members, and supporters. Personal Protective Equipment has been crucial to keeping those we serve and our employees safe. Countless individuals, churches, civic groups, and organizations generously provided face masks to our individuals and staff during critical supply shortages. Grants and support from local foundations have played a huge role in meeting basic needs for those we serve. Through these incredible resources, we have been able to establish technology to meet service needs, provide safer care utilizing enhanced PPE and infection control supplies, and provide a number of individuals with the means to afford expenses, like rent and utilities.

### Time to engage with those closest to us

Many of our individuals found themselves suddenly home and unable to work, providing a unique opportunity for those we serve and our staff to learn even more about each other. The increased support that our staff provided resulted in person-centered care that was tailored to each individual’s needs more than ever before. Those we have been able to serve during the pandemic have not only grown skills in new areas, but they’ve also built stronger relationships with their roommates and support staff. We discovered new interests, learned more about each other’s passions, and saw many people flourish as they gained independence in new, unique ways.

### Enhanced service areas and maximized resources

We utilized technology in new and unique ways in order to address consumer and staff needs in a safe, virtual way. We were able to finish planned construction on our main office facilities to better meet the needs of both consumers and staff, which would have been difficult to complete with the level of traffic that the building would typically have. Our expanded storage capacity, improved kitchen, and new laundry facilities will enable us to better support our individual’s needs.

### Increased partnerships with local colleges and students

As many businesses postponed and canceled their internships, HCO was able to expand our internship and field experiences for local college students and offer great experiences both virtually and in-person. HCO is currently hosting 4x the normal number of interns for the 2021 spring semester alone.

As we look ahead into the future, one thing continues to remain constant: we know that people will continue to need other people. One of the biggest challenges that society will face during the next ten years will be the lack of health care providers, and we can’t serve our friends and neighbors in the community without a workforce. Our organization and others like us continue to face a shortage of employees to meet the need of all those who need our services. We encourage you to share the opportunities to work or volunteer with HCO with your friends and loved ones, and to consider getting involved with our organization yourself if you have not already done so.

**Today, tomorrow, or even a year from now - it’s never too late to make a difference in the lives of those we serve.**

# Home and Community Options, Inc.

## Statement of Financial Position

Year Ended: December 31st	2020	2019
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### ASSETS

TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	\$3,768,909	\$2,440,702
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Escrows and reserves	\$153,171	\$86,257
Property and equipment, net	\$3,405,478	\$3,664,357
Long-term investments	\$4,148,874	\$4,253,081
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	\$7,707,523	\$8,003,695
TOTAL ASSETS	\$11,476,432	\$10,444,397

### LIABILITIES

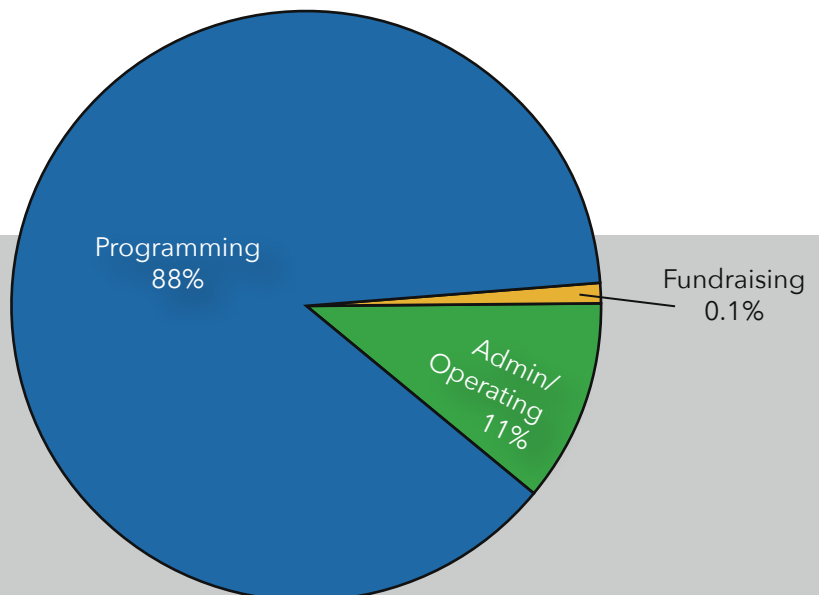
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$685,408	\$911,358
LONG-TERM DEBT - net of current portion	\$156,521	\$366,152
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$841,929	\$1,277,510

### NET ASSETS

UNRESTRICTED	\$10,098,135	\$8,623,406
RESTRICTED\TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	\$536,368	\$543,481
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$10,634,503	\$9,166,887

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$11,476,432	\$10,444,397
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**2020**  
Allocation  
of Expenses





Everyone at HCO has experienced a huge change since the initial Stay-At-Home order in reaction to COVID-19. It has been Dan Milian's job over the past few months to help HCO maximize the technology it has available to safely operate during the pandemic.

Dan acts as the IT Desk for the agency. His role used to have him in and out of HCO's various houses numerous times on a weekly basis, fixing computers or rotating out equipment. While he continues to help out staff at the programs work on faxing or scanning important files and papers, visits to the houses in person are now only occurring in an emergency. These days he is office-bound, walking people through computer problems on the phone.

At the beginning of March, the agency was already talking through various phases of their pandemic plan, assessing critical agency functions and the roles of its main office employees. Who was cross-trained and would be able to step in should someone become ill? Who would be able to take on new roles? Who could provide additional support to program staff and their supervisors in the event of positive COVID cases?

At times, it feels like almost business as usual at the Central Office - with a few exceptions. Bottles of hand sanitizer and disinfectant cleaner are stationed throughout the building. Symptom and temperature screenings are completed by staff in masks when they arrive. The main office is used to seeing staff and individuals HCO supports stop by regularly to drop off paperwork or pick up supplies, head downstairs into the office kitchen to work on cooking skills, make art in the resource area, or just pop their head in for a quick hello to catch up. Now, doors to offices are closed up, and traffic throughout the building has been restricted. Central Office staff rarely have face-to-face interactions with each other, and in their place is an abundance of communication through phone and video.

About a week before the mid-March Stay-At-Home order, Dan already had a pretty good idea of how much things were likely to change. "I started thinking about what could be done to mitigate the problems a quarantine would present," he shared. One of his first projects was to make sure that the needed technology and equipment was in place so HCO's management personnel and office staff could function without coming into contact with each other. Would they need to quarantine? What would a worst-case scenario look like? After careful consideration, their team at the main office was able to make a number of adjustments to processes

that put safety, social distancing, and infection control systems in place, which enabled minimal disruption to the building's staff and duties.

A number of the adjustments HCO had to take were made easier by steps that were already being worked on since last year. In HCO's homes, being able to stay connected through Zoom has been a life changer. Through it, multiple people can attend a virtual face-to-face meeting. HCO had already begun introducing Zoom for Healthcare last fall as a way to deal with reducing costs in areas that have consistently been a challenge for agencies like HCO: underfunded mileage expenses, additional staffing support needs at program sites, and the potential for growing training capacity utilizing the new technology. Implementation was scheduled to roll out slowly, with limited programs piloting the software for use before expanding to encompass the whole agency. When the pandemic hit, as Dan described it, "instead of tip-toeing down the hill, we got pushed over the cliff." Everyone had to get up to speed on how to use video communication - very quickly.

In another stroke of luck, HCO was in the process of purchasing iPads for its residential programs when the first cases of COVID-19 began appearing throughout the country. While originally acquired for the purposes of supporting nursing, documentation, and training needs at HCO's various sites, the iPads have found multiple other uses in the wake of the pandemic. They are providing a critical doorway for friends and family to stay connected with their loved ones in HCO's care. It's also been an engaging way for HCO's individuals - many of whom lead very active and productive social lives before the pandemic - to participate in various types of events and activities. Classes in chair yoga and adaptive dance, bingo games, scavenger hunts, and craft projects like window and door decorating for Easter or Mother's Day are providing fun throughout the day while HCO residents are at home and unable to work. The most fun of all are the birthday parties, where HCO individuals across all houses get together through Zoom to sing happy birthday to one another.

COVID-19 has been likened as people having to "fly the plane while its being built," but the experience has provided a number of opportunities for innovation and creativity. Dan has been active in finding ways to help other departments leverage technology to implement new ideas. A recent project involved working with Amazon to get HCO registered as an essential business providing health care. The designation, an idea he credits to coworker Ashly Bissen, enabled HCO to get prioritized access to additional sources of PPE (personal protective equipment), such as gloves, masks, and hazardous waste bags.

It has been a struggle on and off for HCO to secure more than just PPE. Dan's work to procure technology equipment to enable teams to do their jobs without risking their own health and safety was also a challenge early on. With the state's move to distance learning for children in school, families and friends using video software to stay in touch with loved ones, and other businesses doing their best to continue working where they can, he had to get creative in finding sources for purchasing things like video cables, webcams and audio headsets. "Technology equipment was really hard to come by for a while," Dan shared. "Third party sellers have been charging 3-4 times what they would have for a webcam 6 months ago. A lot of electronics stores have been sold out or have very limited quantities. We had some difficulty in the beginning finding what we needed, but it's gotten better."

Dan thinks that in the future we can expect to see a continuation of more virtual meetings and less in-person gathering. "We're all here for the individuals," he says, "so it's been a struggle. People are really missing each other!" For that reason, he hopes that at some point HCO will be able to resume some level of in-person meetings and visits in the future.







# A NUMBERS GAME

In April, Troy temporarily moved out of his home at 142 to stay with his parents while the world was still trying to figure out how to respond to COVID-19. It was a scary time to be making such a big change and no one knew how long it was going to last, but Troy, his family, and his HCO care team worked together to determine what would be the best case scenario for Troy's specific needs. Troy shares more about the time he spent with family before returning home over the summer:

## How did you feel when the possibility of staying with your parents was first brought up?

*"I thought it was awesome. That way I could hang out with them more. My parents were really scared, especially when the numbers would go up. I was kind of scared too - that's why we didn't want to go to the doctors or appointments or anything yet. I think they felt safer having me at home."*

## Did it take a while to kind of get settled in, get into a new routine?

*"It really only took about a day. I have my own room at my parents and my own bed and clothes there, so that helped."*

## What was your day-to-day like at your parents?

*"Dad and I would get groceries, but I would stay in the truck. I would watch the people going in and out of the store. The first time I did it there was about 30 with masks and 45 without and I was like, c'mon man! Then when the mask rule came down, there were a lot more with masks. It was fun."*

## What were some of the highlights of your time there?

*"I would ride my bike around the block, and I would go riding with my parents by Prairie Island, Goodview, and the new park by the trailer court. Then my mom and dad had to get 'motorcycle bikes' (E-assist bikes) because they couldn't hardly keep up with me. I would be at the top of the hill and they'd be just starting. Then when they got the motor bikes they'd beat me up the hill, ha ha. It was so fun though. I worked on a work bench and cupboards with my dad, too. I would hold the boards and screw the screws in and I got to use the jigsaw, too! It was really fun putting the cupboards together with dad and helping him out. And we built a birdhouse together. It's called 'Troy's Hotel'. We put it by the front porch at 142 after I moved back, and there's two birds trying to build nests in it right now."*

## How did you feel about moving back to 142?

*"I thought it was about time. Mom was kind of worried about me, about if I would get COVID or not, and I kind of was, too. We felt okay though because staff were wearing masks and everything, and that helped mom a lot, too."*

## How did you keep in touch with your parents after you returned to 142?

*"FaceTime. I got a cell phone and would use it to FaceTime with them. I would usually call them a few times a day, once in the morning and once before bed. Before all this happened I usually called them once a day, but I got to visit them a lot - sometimes on weekends and especially holidays. I wasn't happy about not visiting them like normal, but staff would take me for drives to go see them, they would stay on the deck and we would stay in the van. Some other times we would go fishing at the Minnesota City Boat Club. I would go with staff on one dock and my parents would go on another dock so we could keep our distance. It was like we were fishing together."*

**Troy returned to 142 after the 4th of July. He's happy to be back spending time with his roommates again, and he continues to enjoy frequent visits with his loved ones.**



*Staff Spotlight,  
October 2020*

*Cedar and her husband, Dylan, welcomed their daughter Birdie to the world in the fall of 2020. Birdie is now 6 months old and they couldn't be more in love.*

Cedar Paulson Mueller was married in October of 2019. She met her future husband when she was in high school and working part-time at Fleet Farm. "I don't know how he fell for me when I was wearing that orange shirt!" Cedar jokes.

Originally from Cochrane, Wisconsin, Cedar grew up attending Cochrane-Fountain City Schools but graduated from Winona Senior High School. She later went on to attend Winona State University and majored in Social Work.

Her introduction to Home and Community Options came while she was taking a service learning class in high school. Her teacher suggested choosing a field that would be challenging and out of her area of experience, so Cedar chose the Developmental Achievement Center (DAC). The DAC provides coaching and job support to people with disabilities, and while there, Cedar heard a lot about HCO from the people there. Cedar thought, "Gee, how fun would it be to work with people all day long instead of just while they are at work!" so she applied to HCO in 2014 and has been here ever since.

When she began working for HCO, she provided support to four gentlemen. "It was super fun," she shared. In her years with the agency, she has supported people living in their own homes/apartments or with family and has also worked with young children. Cedar thinks that Winona seems to be unique in the fact that there are so many agencies that serve individuals with special needs. She says she talks to people from other towns and they are amazed, because they don't have such resources. One of her favorite parts of the job is getting to know the individuals and their loved ones. "What you can learn from them is so important," she says.

Cedar is currently the Primary Counselor at a program supporting a group of women with ages ranging from 23 to 91. Cedar emphasizes that the job is primarily a teaching job. Early on in her career with HCO, a coworker told Cedar, "Work yourself out of a job. Teach them so well that they don't need you anymore." Cedar teaches not only the individuals she supports, but also the new staff who come in to help. And, she says, she teaches staff how to teach, too.

When Cedar is training new staff, she always tells them to treat the individuals the way staff would like to be

treated, or how they would want a family member to be treated and cared for. "Clean as if you were cleaning for your family," she tells them. If a new staff member makes a mistake, it is often because they have no experience in keeping someone else safe. It's not always super tough, she tells new staff. "It's usually smooth sailing, but there are hiccups sometimes!" Cedar says it's all about teaching, and she encourages staff to "use your resources."

Cedar feels that having empathy is an extremely important part of the job. "If you don't have empathy to start, you'll definitely gain it after working at HCO!" It's also important as a staff to find a balance between doing things for someone when they need it and encouraging them to do what they are capable of doing. "They should be allowed to do everything they can for themselves - even the kids. When you let go of control, you allow someone else to be your teacher."

Patience is helpful too - both with the people you support but also with yourself. There are times when Cedar remembers coming home frustrated. "It is something you constantly work on," Cedar says. Some days are a struggle. "Other days, I come home from work and say, 'I did really well today!'"

COVID has made life for those she supports very different. Since they have a few people at a higher risk if they were to contract COVID-19, it is essential to be cautious and take extensive measures to ensure their safety. The staff understand that the ladies' safety is important and are doing as much as they can to reduce the risk. They eat meals at different times, sanitize high touch surfaces often, frequently wash their hands, and they all wear masks - even the ladies. "It has been a challenge at times."

Everyone is currently home and trying to stay busy. The women Cedar supports are not currently working, so they do a lot of crafts in their spare time. Some ladies enjoy their alone time watching TV, playing games, or being on their computers. They talk to friends on the phone and participate in zoom activities. Like everyone, the ladies are sometimes bummed that so many events and activities are canceled. While they aren't going out and doing as many things like they used to, they understand the importance of being safe and healthy.

Cedar emphasizes that they are all part of a team and that part of the job is making sure everyone is safe - both individuals and coworkers. Cedar has been exposed to coworkers that have tested positive twice. "Both times I freaked out a bit," she says. "I am pregnant, so I am considered high risk because they are not sure how the virus can (or if it does) affect the baby. The first time I was exposed, I was only about 10 weeks. More recently, I have been 30+ weeks, so the stress for me hasn't gotten any better," she shared. "Overall, HCO has handled the positive cases well. Each time, I received a phone call from our Executive Director explaining the situation and assessing my exposure level." Data surrounding COVID-19 is constantly changing as more information is being learned about the virus, so HCO works closely with the Minnesota Department of Health to interview and assess exposures of staff and the individuals HCO supports. This enables HCO to continually assess the infection control practices at their residential sites, develop improved protocols, and provide additional staff training if needed.

Adequate staffing was an ongoing challenge for HCO before the pandemic, and the struggle has only been exacerbated by COVID-19. When someone is being tested and they have symptoms, they are not able to work until their test results come back. The care needs of those HCO serves haven't lessened and it can be a struggle for many HCO programs to find alternative support when a scheduled staff cannot come in to work due to illness or a potential exposure. Luckily, current employees have been very understanding, flexible, and willing to pick up additional shifts to help - often at the last minute. "Our house has done well and staff have been more than willing to pick up their co-workers' hours, Cedar shares. "We are so grateful for our fantastic bunch of staff we have."

For staff, getting to know the people you support is the key to providing high quality care. Knowing people's interests is important to helping them enjoy life, but knowing what they struggle with or dislike can be just as important. "Sometimes jokes and a good laugh will improve everyone's mood, but other times, it might take having some one-on-one time with an individual who is struggling." Cedar will often spend time with an individual one-on-one to chat and provide encouragement, or offer a bubble bath. The house has a big walk-in tub, and all the women love a bubble bath. "We all have cranky days," Cedar says. "Usually everything can be fixed or talked out. Everyone is different."

Despite all the changes because of COVID-19, Cedar shares that the best part of the job is working with the individuals day-to-day and seeing what brings them joy or makes them laugh. "I wish more people knew about HCO," she says. "We do a lot of amazing things. The world would look very different if more people understood just how much we are all capable of."





by Jonathan Roberts, Coordinator

As 2020 dawned and folks were energized with the “new year, new me” vigor of a brand-new decade, reports of a novel coronavirus started seeping into the national conversation. In February, the United States declared a public health emergency and in March, declared COVID-19 a pandemic. One by one things started to close. Some of the individuals’ day programs and job sites shut down, the local universities seemed to go on Spring Break and never return, and the “Safer at Home” orders began to come out. The 142 guys are a very active bunch and someone is always coming or going, so this decision was met with mixed emotions – the gentlemen were initially pretty happy to get a break from work, but the realization that it also meant they couldn’t go out with their friends or go to their favorite restaurants dampened their mood.

The men do the vast majority of their own shopping and for the household with staff support. Whether getting groceries, office supplies and printer paper from the Central Office, or some more toothpaste for their own use, they’re doing it and staff are just along for the ride. Their weekly calendars are typically filled with Project Compass activities, outings with friends, dates with significant others, family gatherings and parties, and some one-on-one time with staff to get a break from their housemates. Naturally, this all changed.

Anything that could be ordered online for delivery. Steve’s weekly church outings with family were canceled. Troy was signed up to volunteer at the Mid West Music Fest for his 6th year and also had a vacation planned, both of which were put on indefinite hold. John would frequently hang out with his friend Tim on the weekends, play some basketball and then grab a snack at Lakeview, but we had to stop making those plans. Jamie liked to go out and watch some sports with staff, but that was no longer an option. Paul, on the flip side, liked when he had the house all to himself – some peace and quiet and a nice nap in his recliner – but now everyone was home. “I’m sick of all that whoopin’ and hollerin’,” as he would say.

As spring stretched into summer, the gentlemen acclimated to their new routines. Everyone was pretty happy about a slower start to the morning without work to get ready for, though some were ready to greet the day like always with an unwavering circadian rhythm. Meal times shifted a little bit from what they were used to when working and to try to lessen the number of people together without masks while eating. John was usually at work at the time, but was now finally able to watch *The Price is Right* every morning. It eventually became a household event that everyone looked forward to, cheering on the contestants. Steve grew up on a farm and got back to his roots, using his pedal tractors to “farm” in the yard. Any time you’d ask him how he’s doing or what he’s working on, he’d tell you how many loads he chopped, if he still needed to clean out the barn, or if his brother, Rick, broke the tractor again. At 78, Paul finally started acting his age and would settle into his recliner after lunch to “rest his eyes” after doing some cleaning in the morning and



catching a nature program on TV. Troy liked to challenge his housemates or staff to a billiards tournament using the pool table in the basement. Jamie loved to play bags or "cornhole" in the afternoon (thanks to a staff that brought their boards over from home), before grabbing a lawn chair and a cold brew while soaking his feet in some cool water in the kiddie pool.

Everyone became a bit more tech savvy over the summer. They used the new program iPad that was provided by a grant to keep in touch with their families and friends. HCO's Events Coordinator and her dedicated interns were able to come up with some fun and creative activities to put on each day. Birthdays were still celebrated, bingo was still played, Adaptive Dance was still boogied, holiday traditions kept alive, and there was even a talent show where individuals were able to show off their unique talents and skills. Everyone was keeping it safe by keeping it digital. One of our staff brought their guitar to the program to help the guys pass the time. John loves to sing, so the two started having regular "band practice" almost every day. They put together a short repertoire of covers, one of which they performed for the talent show. While it didn't take the place of their weekly church outings, Steve was still able to see his family and celebrate birthdays via Zoom. Troy bought a smartphone towards the end of summer to video call his folks regularly to keep in touch and see their dogs.

Over the summer, it was hard to see most of the regular events and activities the guys loved to do outside either being canceled or moved on to a computer screen, but they were far from cooped up. One of the staff loved fishing just as much as some of the guys and would take one or two out at a time to some of his "secret spots." In the sunshine and fresh air, being able to net a few crappies and stay the epitome of socially distanced sounds like a perfect afternoon in 2020. We made a map of some "low key" hiking spots that are typically unpopulated that the men liked exploring, head to a state park on less populated days, or would take a nice stroll down to the Garvin Heights Lookout and back. With five burger fans in the house, the grill on the back deck was put to use more this past summer than I think it ever has, as well as cooking some of that fish they would catch.

Things didn't change much as fall approached. One Zoom call seemed to bleed into another, and I think we were all losing our sense of time a bit. We'd make sure to get out and enjoy every nice day we could, fire up the grill, and hope it wouldn't be the final time for the season. "Minnesnowta" was drawing closer. Everyone was tired and pandemic fatigue had set in, but then in October (after the September spike), some things seemed to be moving in the right direction. There were talks of a vaccine on the horizon, some of the day and work programs were able to start services again, and there was the usual holiday electricity that was starting to build, though we still didn't know what the 2020 holiday season would look like.

John, Jamie, and Steve were able to go back to work in late October, with new rules and new guidelines, but they were all very happy to be able to see their friends and coworkers again. We were unsure of what it was going to look like for them to change up their regular routine again, but they pretty well jumped right in and got back to the grind, packing their lunch for the next day, waking up on time, getting ready for the day, and waiting for their ride. "The van is here!" John will shout when he sees it pull up. Steve, who is often getting in a second cup of coffee before he leaves, grabs his lunch and follows John out while Jamie lags a little bit behind, begrudgingly stuffing his feet into his shoes, not quite as excited as the other two.

Halloween came up quick and the men were ready to get spooky, looking forward to the Project Compass Halloween Dance. Troy worked on his set



list to play as The DJ Man and worked with staff to learn how to stream his music through Zoom for the other participants since they were not able to have the dance in person. The men and staff were busy decorating the house, making some treats, and dressing up, each in their own way. Whenever anyone asks John what he wants to dress up as for Halloween, he always says very excitedly, "a witch!" regardless of what costume he ends up deciding on wearing. Jamie and Troy each dug into their own costume bins and put together fun outfits, and since Paul and Steve generally don't like to dress up, but regularly wear jeans and a flannel shirt, they wore their traditional "farmer costumes" this year (again).



It seems like it happens every year, that once everyone has polished off their Halloween candy, November and December seem to fly by. Even under the odd malaise of a seemingly never-ending pandemic, this year was no different. Everyone was eager to see their family for Thanksgiving and Christmas in whatever way that they felt safe. For some that was a small, masked family gathering with special guidance and protocols, for others it was stopping by to exchange presents and chat in the driveway but keeping their distance, and for everyone, a lot of time on Zoom and the phone, checking in and spreading holiday cheer. Working with the families of the men this past holiday season under the stress and confusion of the pandemic was a testament to the symbiotic relationship that we often enjoy: All parties working together to support the men in doing what they want to do and being with who they want to be with, all while maintaining a safe environment.

As a Coordinator, scheduling the holidays is often a nightmare. Everyone would request off if they could. For some of our student workers, it might be one of the few chances per year that they get to see their family for any significant period of time while juggling school and work. I think it is important to recognize the sacrifice that many of our staff make to ensure that all individuals supported by HCO have special, cheerful holidays. At 142, when Cassidy saw she was scheduled for Thanksgiving, she took it head on, worked with the guys to plan out all of the meals, and cooked a full-on feast. Like a proper Thanksgiving, there were leftovers for days, which the men thoroughly enjoyed. Kelsey and Bre took on the majority of the Christmas shopping with the men, making sure that friends and family had something unique for them to open on Christmas morning. Nate had already put in his notice that he would be resigning, but still followed through with his commitment to work Christmas, taking the men out to see the holiday lights, sing Christmas songs, and retire for the evening with their favorite holiday movies and popcorn. Each program has staff like this. They are the heart of our workforce and they deserve to be appreciated as such.

Well, it just wouldn't be 142 without some sort of calamity striking during the winter. Last year, it was





plumbing issues on Super Bowl Sunday. This year, the furnace went out on New Year's Eve. While most folk were well on their way to merrymaking and making some new resolutions, HCO was buzzing with phone calls, problem solving, and figuring it out. Since the Saehler Drive program at the time was not being used, the Coordinator, Shelby, offered to have the men stay there. The 142 staff worked to get the men packed up and ready for a little vacation, not knowing when they would be able to get back into their own home. Staff stayed late, came in early, worked on their holiday, and did whatever needed to be done to make sure that the men were safe and sound. Staff worked to help the men cope with the sudden changes and unfamiliar place. They brought over Steve's pedal tractor with a plow on the front which he used to plow off the basketball court, allowing the men to bundle up and utilize Saehler's basketball hoop. The men settled in at Saehler until the furnace was replaced and they were able to return home. Though they were very thankful to Shelby and the rest of the Saehler crew for putting them up for a few days, they were happy to sleep in their own beds again.

This brings us to the end of 2020. At that time, vaccines looked promising, but were slow in rolling out. Some of the 142 gentlemen had voted in the recent election and were watching the news closely. Murder hornets didn't end up being as big of a deal as we thought they were going to be. Everyone seemed very excited to just not be in 2020 anymore, full of careful hope.

After all of the chaos and uncertainty of the past year, I want to take a moment to make something perfectly clear: the biggest takeaway that everyone should get out of reading this is the resilience, adaptability, and strength that the men showed throughout the entire year. It was a big year - with a lot of big changes - but the guys rolled with the punches. They really showed their true colors, which are big, beautiful, and bright. Our staff stepped up and consistently went above and beyond any reasonable expectation "during these unprecedented times," but the individuals we support deserve just as much recognition.

So, while this story centers around the five men who live at 142 (and their dozen or so support staff) during 2020, there are countless other individuals across our community receiving support from HCO, with staff working hard to support them, just like us. Each has their own story - some similar to ours, others very different - but in each and every one you will find an indomitable spirit, distinct and recognizable by the characters in it. The men I support have taught me so much, and I am thankful every day to be a part of their story.



## ABOUT JONATHAN

*My name is Jonathan Roberts, and I am the Coordinator at the 142 program.*

*I began working with the men who live at 142 in 2012 as a direct care staff, gradually taking on higher responsibilities before settling into my current role as the program's Coordinator.*

# IN REMEMBRANCE...



Paul Erpelding



Mary Kobus



Sue Sasser

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