A System in Crisis, Part 2
by Darryl Wood

With statewide unemployment being less than 4%, minimum wage increases mean that unskilled labor is in competition for the same positions as skilled labor, such as certified nursing assistants and direct support professionals. Rates of reimbursement for agencies like LEAP have decreased 12% since 2007 while inflation has increased 19%. Agencies providing services to individuals under sections 21 and 29 are finding it increasingly difficult to find quality staff, in adequate numbers to support people safely and properly. In the last newsletter, I explained how this impacts our ability to provide quality services because of turnover and compassion fatigue. In this article, I thought to share an update on our advocacy efforts.

When it became apparent that DHHS was not going to increase rates (in fact they submitted another decrease), I and other support organization leaders decided that we needed to ask for help. We started by educating our legislators on the rate history, what we are mandated to do, and how this impacts our staff and clients in a negative way. This grassroots effort was enlightening and successful, and we are fortunate to have Russell Black, Tom Saviello and Lance Harvell all coming out in support of our initiative. In fact, Lance is a co-sponsor of legislation designed to provide rate relief. Our next step was to talk with the people of Maine, and we started with our own employees, then took our story to the media. The view from here is that if our neighbors knew and understood what the real story is, they would support our cause on behalf of so many thousands of Maine families. There has been extensive and in-depth coverage statewide; with LEAP being featured in the Franklin Journal, the Sun Journal and in a radio program on Maine Public Radio. Here are links to two of those stories: http://mainepublic.org/post/agencies-helping-developmentally-intellectually-disabled-urge-boost-funding-amid-staffing http://www.pressherald.com/2016/12/14/commentary-despite-assurance-to-the-contrary-services-to-disabled-worsening/

The way LEAP gets reimbursed for services starts after a Direct Support Professional becomes certified and then provides a documented hour of support to a qualified individual. That rate per hour was $25.37 in 2007, it is now less than $22 per hour. Out of that $22 comes all the costs of doing business that we are mandated to provide: Background checks, all staff training, benefit time, health insurance, general insurance, worker’s compensation, housing, supplies, utilities, maintenance, administration, HR, etc. What is left is what we can afford to pay people, and I can tell you it is not enough. Direct Support Professionals at LEAP provide skilled labor and often deal with life and death situations at work, and the wages are equal to or sometimes less than someone pushing a broom or stocking shelves at a big box store. Competing in a free market economy with a decreasing fixed rate of reimbursement at the same time regulations and unfunded mandates continue to escalate is a recipe for disaster. We have no means of adjusting to inflation factors like the minimum wage law or the overtime rule for salaried employees. For each dollar of increased minimum wage, it costs LEAP at least $250k. That’s $250k we have no means of adjusting our billing for. Currently we are at a point of pending disaster, so what are we doing? We will continue our public outreach, and have submitted legislation to increase our rates to the 2007 level plus the rate of inflation since then. We have sponsors in the legislature, and believe we have broad bi-partisan support. That said, this is still an uphill battle. We need to get our bill through two legislative committees (HHS and Appropriations), and then avoid a governor’s veto. Even if successful, in 3 years when the minimum wage is $12/hour we will be back in the same situation. It seems a little silly that so much time and work has to go into fighting for what amounts to basic economics--but our mission, our staff and the people we are charged with assisting are too important to not see this through.

LEAP’s Board of Directors 2016-17

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Mission Statement:
Life Enrichment Advancing People (LEAP), exists for the following purpose: To empower people with disabilities to lead joyful lives with dignity, independence, and autonomy by providing comprehensive and individualized supports. The fundamental operating principle followed by LEAP in providing services is to strive for each individual’s fulfillment of:

*Physical Well Being
* Self Expression
*Experiences of Joy


http://www.pressherald.com/2016/12/14/commentary-despite-assurance-to-the-contrary-services-to-disabled-worsening/
Important People You Know in Our Communities...

One Voice of Hope  
*by Kim Levensalor*

Jodi Sincyr voted in this presidential election with the assistance of her support staff.

Here she is sharing an empowered smile, and rocking her “I Voted” sticker after casting her ballot!

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Wellness from the Garden  
*by Kyla Wheeler*

Arlene Emerson of Industry Road is seen here shelling peas that she picked from her own garden, with staff member Linda Stevens.

A nice and timely reminder that next summer is closer than we think!

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It’s the little things  
*by Cristy Foss*

Abby received her brand new therapeutic 10-pound weighted blanket recently, and she was so excited to show every staffer who came in just how cool it is!

Therapeutic weighted blankets have proven effective in promoting a sense of calm, comfort, and security, and Abby sure loves hers.

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According to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the age of Discrimination Act of 1975, LEAP does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, handicap or age in recruiting, hiring, training or promoting. We also avoid discrimination in admission or access to treatment in all programs and activities.
Welcome to our newest staff members!

Glenn Gordon, Cynthia-Lin Knowles, Jenny Macomber, Kimberly Savage, Loretta Crockett, Betsy Bachelder, Rose Redman, Divante North, Catherine Reno and Deseree Brown

We’re glad you joined the LEAP Team!

Training Center Updates

by Alfred Dufour

Lots going on here, check it out!

Foundations: Building Healthy Relationship

LEAP has recently begun an educational support group for individuals who have expressed interest in having a relationship, or identified that as a goal. The main focus is on healthy relationships and the individuals direct the topics that are discussed. We meet once a month as a group, and offer an option of one on one sessions. In September, LEAP hosted a workshop on becoming an educator presented by Katherine McLaughlin at Franklin Memorial Hospital, which was attended by 3 of our own staff, as well as staff from other agencies.

Magic Night expands to Town Farm Road

LEAP’s Anson Street site has hosted the weekly “Magic, the Gathering” game nights since its inception, and now our Town Farm Road site will be hosting this event once a month. Our group has grown, and now we have 4 to 5 individuals and 2-3 staff playing on a regular basis.

Karaoke Fever

LEAP has added karaoke to our growing list of offered activities. We hold karaoke parties at least bi-monthly and have themed parties in line with the holidays. So far we had Halloween, Holiday Carols, and next will be Valentine’s Day.

Our Mission and Values

At Life Enrichment Advancing People (LEAP), our mission centers on empowering people of all abilities to lead lives with dignity, independence and autonomy by providing comprehensive and individualized supports. Our foundational principle is to provide services that encourage well being, self expression and experiences of joy.

We carry out our mission by focusing on three main areas for support: maintaining optimum health, expanding communication options, and having many experiences of joy. This is done through emphasizing healthy lifestyles and autonomy, and providing opportunities for community participation.

LEAP supports people in small groups, individualized apartments, in various community supports, and through a small community respite program. We adopt an individualized and holistic approach to tailor our services to each person and family’s goals and expectations.

"We believe in the worth and dignity of all people. We promote experiences of joy, wellness, and personal growth."
Celebrating 36+ years of Wellness, Hope and Joy!

Chili Challenge Invitation!
by Deelight Zitzelberger

One of the joys of authentic community is getting to bounce ideas off each other, and that is exactly what happened again recently behind the scenes here in Franklin County. As a result, here’s a fun opportunity to showcase local people’s creative passion for food, and having a good time together while raising funds for neighbors with developmental disabilities. If you have Iron Chef tendencies (or even if you don’t), please mark your calendar and register today. Or if you really just love good conversation and competition, (and trying new versions of a longtime winter favorite), come on down to Tuck’s and support LEAP with your donation and get your spicy fill... See details below, and sign up today, thanks!

1st Annual Great Chili Challenge
Hosted by Tuck’s Ale House, 160 Main Street in Farmington
Feb 18, 2017 - 4pm until 8pm or whenever the chili runs out!
All proceeds to benefit LEAP, a local nonprofit providing daily living supports to adults with developmental disabilities in western Maine
Looking for LOTS of chili chefs and connoisseurs, to settle for all time (or until next year’s challenge)
just WHO is The Best Chili Chef in Franklin County!
Voting by Attendees and Celebrity Judges: Nate Morin, Pastor Steve Bracy and more!
Will we see YOU there? Sure hope so...you won’t want to miss this fun memory-making event while supporting community members!
$5 donation to sample and vote on ALL of the entries!
Top Chili Chef gets LEAP gear and a $25 Tucks Certificate
To Register call 778-3466 or e-mail contact info to Deelight@leapcommunity.org
Or sign up at Tucks/160 Main St. Farmington

I Can Be a Hero?
by Deelight Zitzelberger

Everyday heroes are all around us, and we even get to hear about them on the news once in a while. Usually, though, the people doing the greatest good in our communities are acting outside the limelight...on purpose.

Because LEAP is a nonprofit, we rely on sustaining relationships with citizens from all walks of life.

So, your planned giving makes a difference in the quality of life for the people we serve, as many of their daily living needs are not Medicaid-funded. As you consider becoming one of our monthly partners, please accept our ongoing gratitude for the power of your quietly meaningful gifts.

As you are thinking about where your own giving budget may have the greatest impact at the local level, please do visit http://www.leapcommunity.org/about-us for more about giving options, or contact Darryl@leapcommunity.org with any questions.

Our family of faithful donors will always have room for YOU!
Community Happenings
by Darryl Wood
The LEAP Christmas tree was among the Best in Show at the Rotary’s Annual Festival of Trees in December, raising approximately $400 towards their benevolent community activities. At right is the LEAP tree in blue, with a look down the line at right, and a heart-warming photo of the entertainment. Many thanks to Kim Levensalor, Katrina Fay and Melisa Foss, who spearheaded the decorating with little fanfare. Numerous other staff members donated ornaments as well. While they did the onsite work, many, many positive comments put LEAP in high regard and high spirits at the show!

Christmas Wellness & Joy!
The holidays were just around the corner when the ladies from our TFR1 site, Wendy Haynes and Irene Rose, started planning last fall with their annual trip to Santa’s Village to get their present request in early. As the temperatures dropped, they went down to Freeport to enjoy a warm cocoa and take in L.L.Bean’s Northern Lights Festival as well.

More Christmas Cheer!
At left, Roger C. enjoys some “holiday hat” fun with Kim Sequoia, Keep House Manager. Keep House also hosted a tree at the “Rumford Festival of Trees” this year. Roger also helped with the set up and decorating, and was proud to have joined in the fun. At right, Roger C. and Stephen D. sporting their new Andover, ME Fireman shirts. This is a wonderful way to support local emergency responders!
Oliver House News  
*by Jane Shaw*

Hello to all from the Oliver House team! We have been enjoying the fall and winter months and staying busy. Some fun things we have taken part in were the Scarecrow Decorating Contest, and the Oliver House group enjoyed a pumpkin carving contest. It was really amazing to see so many creative and talented people participate.

Doug Valley is participating in the Adaptive Ski program again this winter at Lost Valley in Auburn. Bill & Cindy Dubois assist Doug to do the Sit-Ski, and have worked with him for quite a few years. Bill and Cindy are very dedicated to this program, and we thank them for their hard work and dedication to assisting Doug and many other individuals to make this a positive experience for them!

Many visitors have enjoyed the use of the snowshoes available at the Stone Soup Garden fitness trail this season. The folks at Oliver House also enjoyed a “Cabin Fever Party” to break up any winter blues, and we all enjoyed a home-cooked meal with strawberry shortcake for dessert. Good times were had by everyone! From all of us at the Oliver House, our hope is for you to “stay safe & well” through the winter months. “Think Spring!”

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Dean Family Doin’s!  
*by Matthew Levensalor*

Recently, the Dean family was able to get together for a Red Claws basketball event. Michael, supported at our Weld Road site, treated his sister Beth, brother Tim, and sister-in-law Vicki to an action-packed game. The family has a long history with LEAP, and makes opportunities to remain close, with parties, holidays, and events, as seen here.
LEAP Earns Top Award, Thanks to Many Hands and Hearts!

As recently celebrated at the Franklin County Chamber’s autumn banquet, local businesses of varying sizes were honored with annual awards. Our executive director, Darryl Wood, shared the following on our having been chosen for the prestigious “2016 Franklin County Large Business of the Year” recognition:

“On behalf of LEAP’s 200 employees, I would like to thank the Chamber of Commerce for this honor. I think first of LEAP as a nonprofit providing a community service, but have come to recognize that we are indeed a large employer for this area. I think this award recognizes the efforts we have put into our employees. “If you take care of the people who take care of the people, the people are well taken care of.” We are proud not only of the awesome people who are supported by LEAP, but by the faithful daily efforts of all our professional staff who make it an effective, safe, and impactful place to work!

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Fall into Fitness Updates!

*by Kristi Iverson*

Greetings from the Wellness Committee! October’s Fall into Fitness program was one last push for wellness before the holiday season geared up. The month-long initiative incorporated many different events chosen for their accessibility and community interest. The 2016 program hosted events such as a fishing derby, followed by a BBQ, a wellness hike at the quarry in Jay, a LEAP team formed for participating in the Franklin County Children’s Task Force Walk, modified yoga for all skill levels, and Zumba at our training and wellness center. The biggest event scheduled to wrap up the autumn cycle was our Costume Karaoke Ball. Approximately 30 people came to LEAP’s Training and Wellness Center to show off their costumes, boogie down and belt out their favorite tunes. As we zoomed on past the holiday season, staff are now eagerly looking forward to the upcoming WOW events in January and February. Stay tuned for more about our Working on Wellness Finale in the spring edition of our newsletter!
Look Who’s Retired!

by Megan Goodine

Noreen Gosselin and Anne Umbro both retired in December, after many years of attending community and work supports at Work First Inc. Friends and family joined both ladies for this momentous occasion and to ensure a fond farewell with co-workers.

Noreen started her time at Work First in 1997 and looked forward to socializing with friends and earning a paycheck. On Fridays, she was happy to report that she got a paycheck for her time running the cash register or hanging clothes in the Touch of Class Thrift Store. Noreen also donated volunteer time to the Buttons for Babes bracelet project. After almost 20 years of work and community supports, Noreen has earned her “retirement badge” and is looking forward to relaxing at home and avoiding the early morning rides to work in the winter.

Anne was one of the first people to be supported by Work First and began attending in 1984 when the community supports program was located in Strong and known as Sandy River Rehabilitation. She had many jobs over the years, including clerical support at LEAP and Harris House, bulk mailing for the Strong Area Health Clinic and The Touch of Class Thrift Store. Anne also volunteered for many years at Genesis by watering the plants. “No Work, No Money” was a common statement she made when asked if she was going to go to work each day. 30+ years later, Anne is definitely enjoying quiet time and a slow-paced lifestyle at home after years of work and a busy schedule. Special thanks to the many DSP’s and support staff from Work First who ensured every day was filled with work experiences, increased independence, income and community integration. Congratulations, Ladies!

“I will not die an unlived life. I will not live in fear of falling or catching fire. I choose to inhabit my days, to allow my living to open me, to make me less afraid, more accessible, to loosen my heart until it becomes a wing, a torch, a promise. I choose to risk my significance; to live so that which comes to me as seed goes to the next as blossom and that which comes to me as blossom, goes on as fruit.”

~ Dawna Markova
7 tips to stay energized and productive this winter

“For many people, the onset of the winter months can trigger a form of depression called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), sometimes called the “winter blues.” But for many more, the limited sunlight, inclement weather and restricted activity just leads to them feeling sluggish and zapped of energy. Now more than ever, it’s important to pay attention to your lifestyle habits and incorporate those that can help keep your energy level stoked. Here’s a rundown of the best winter picker-uppers:

**Get at least 10 minutes of sunlight daily.** Even on a gray day, try to get outside, gaze skyward and let the light hit your eyes. Sunlight plays a role in the production of serotonin—your body’s regulator of energy, mood and sleep quality.

**Rev up your body.** If you’re stuck indoors, try to at least get up and walk around the office as much as possible. Take the stairs. Walk up and down the grocery aisles at a quick pace. This sends fresh, oxygen-rich blood pumping to your muscles for more stamina, and to your brain for more focus.

**Load your menu with vitamin-D rich foods.** Especially if you live in northern climates where sunshine is scarce for months on end, you may lack sufficient vitamin D levels, needed for energy. Dairy foods are rich in this “sunshine vitamin.” Other good vitamin D sources include fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, and mackerel.

**Switch to slow-release carbs.** Comfort foods are usually full of sugary “simple” carbohydrates, which release quickly into your bloodstream. This prompts an instant spike in energy, but then an abrupt crash, leaving you feeling extra sluggish. One tasty alternative is a hearty bowl of oatmeal. Oats release carbohydrates more slowly into your bloodstream, leaving you with sustained energy. You’ll also feel fuller longer and less likely to reach for that sugary donut mid-morning! Try tossing in a handful of nuts—they’re chock full of energy-boosting protein, another natural energizer.

**Take on something new.** Whether it’s volunteering for a challenging work assignment or signing up for a painting class, this time of year it’s especially important to find fresh interests to spark your enthusiasm and momentum.

**Keep indoor temperatures moderate.** Overheated indoor air can trigger sleepiness. On the other hand, if you’re shivering in a drafty room, your body will expend energy trying to keep warm, which can be uncomfortable and distracting. If you’re in an office where you can’t control the thermostat, be sure to dress in in layers to put on—or remove—clothing as appropriate. Consider a mini desk fan to keep stale, stuffy air moving.

**Sip green tea.** Like coffee, green tea contains caffeine, but its amino acid (L-theanine) content is reported to leave you feeling alert, yet calm, without the jittery side effects of caffeine in coffee or black tea. As an added bonus, green tea is also full of vitamins.”

Article shared by written permission of Health Advocate.com.
http://blog.healthadvocate.com/2017/01/7-tips-to-stay-energized-and-productive-this-winter/

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*When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied.*

~ Herophilus
A snapshot of what YOUR meaningful support can look like!

**A Will to Seed Wellness, Hope and Joy into Our Communities**

By including LEAP in your planned bequests, you can sow support for the needs of developmentally disabled adults in many western and central Maine communities. This is your opportunity to advocate and provide meaningful impact at the personal level for years to come. We hope that in considering your gift, you will contact our Executive Director, Darryl Wood, at 778-4817 x104. To learn more about other giving and monthly partnering options, please click the Donate Now button at [www.leapcommunity.org](http://www.leapcommunity.org). Your donations can help to fill the needs not covered by MaineCare & Medicaid Funding. Your support can be targeted to an individual, a program, a specific project, or a general donation. Together, we each can make a difference today and every day!

LEAP is a 501 (C)(3) Charitable Organization. Our mailing address is 313 Farmington Falls Road, Farmington, ME 04938

___ I want to support LEAP. Please have someone contact me at: ____________________

I want to provide a tax deductible donation to the agency. Enclosed please find my gift of:

___ $25.00   ___ $50.00   ___ $100.00   Other: __________________

Name: ____________________________
Address: ___________________________
________________________
Phone: (_____ ) ____________________  E-mail: _________________________

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