

Dear Royer-Greaves Community,

Our summer issue of "Community Connection" focuses on a special group of people who brighten up the Royer-Greaves campus year-round: The adults, instructors, aides, and staff of our Adult Training Facility, or ATF.

Please read on to learn more about what the ATF offers participants and their families, to get a sneak peek at new and in-the-works program offerings, and to meet one of our adults, Greg Wells.

We always love to feature stories about the wonderful partnerships Royer-Greaves has with local organizations. In this issue, you'll learn how our spring concert, "Dancing, Drumming, and Singing," was the culmination of months of joyous preparation with two non-profits that support the arts in schools: Musicopia and Dancing Classrooms Philly. You'll also read about the elbow

grease volunteers from Vanguard applied to help us get a former dormitory ready for its next role.

Thanks to these organizations and others, along with our students, adults, teachers, staff, administration, parents, and guardians, for another successful school year! What we do at Royer-Greaves is a community effort. It takes all of us, and we are so grateful to each and every one of you for what you bring to this learning community. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Executive
Director
VICKY MAYER



Deputy
Director
DEBRA JEROME



Less Classroom Time, More Community Time for Royer-Greaves Adults



Participants in Royer-Greaves' Adult Training Facility (A.T.F.) day program are now spending more of their time off campus.

Royer-Greaves began increasing the number of educational field trips and other community-based activities this spring in anticipation of a new state requirement that

every adult spend at least 25 percent of their time each week in the community. The rule takes effect in July, but "we started in May to get people more oriented toward that so they will be ready," said A.T.F. Director Domnic Odida.

The state also requires that no more than three adults participate in any one community activity at the same time, with the idea that small groups are more easily integrated into the broader community than a large group is, Domnic said.

The A.T.F. has practiced decision making, money, and social skills navigating the world of retail at the Lancaster Outlet; enjoyed a tour of Amish Country; taken in several cultural festivals at Penn's Landing; and learned about growing things at Linvilla Orchards.

Domnic anticipates groups of adults will soon volunteer to deliver Meals On Wheels. Some adults who enjoy musical performance have shared their talents with local nursing homes. And Domnic hopes Royer-Greaves adults will soon get their game on at the Chester County Sports Center.

Some trips are half-day, others are full day. Because only three adults can participate together, as many as five vehicles travel from Royer-Greaves every day, Domnic said. Depending on the individuals traveling, the staff-to-adult ratio can be as high as two staff per participant.

For some of Royer-Greaves' 28 adults, the growing *continued on pg. 2*

Royer-Greaves Seeks New Community Opportunities for Adult Participants

Would you welcome a visit from a small group of Royer-Greaves adults and staff at your business or organization?

Royer-Greaves adults are delighted to help your organization and practice life skills. We have talented musicians among us who would love to play the piano for your organization or group. We welcome the opportunity to learn about what your group does and to take part in activities.

Please call Domnic Odida at 610-644-1810 or email him at dodida@royer-greaves.org.



Get to Know Greg Wells, an Adult in Royer-Greaves' Day Program

Greg Wells knows what he likes: Floating in a pool. Noshing on a burger and shake. Swaying to any song by Celine Dion. But because Greg, 57, doesn't use language and is cautious around strangers, it takes time for others to learn anything about him.

The slow process of earning his trust and learning to speak his language – based on tactile response, vocalization, gestures, and facial expression – is worthwhile, say those who've done it.

Greg is funny, trusting, and understands much more than most people suspect.

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number of community-based activities have been a welcome adventure, said Domnic. “We plan activities ahead of time so that everyone knows what is happening and they are prepared and looking forward to it,” he said.

But some adults prefer to stay in familiar surroundings. “We have some individuals who are refusing to participate. They are just not enjoying it at all,” he said.

Domnic, Royer-Greaves Executive Director Vicky Mayer, Royer-Greaves Deputy Director Debra Jerome, and many others who work with or are the parents or guardians of Pennsylvania adults with intellectual disabilities have been lobbying the state to create an



exemption for those who would prefer less time in the community, or be better served in other ways.

“There has been ongoing advocacy about this for over the past two years,” Domnic said.

“We always want to tailor our educational and other opportunities to each person’s individual needs and preferences,” Vicky said. “Some of our adults are thrilled to be off campus more, and

they are learning from these experiences and gaining independence. But others do not want to go, and are not benefiting. We work hard to give adults freedom of choice wherever possible – it is central to their dignity – and we hope the state will find a way to support us, our adults, and their families in this.”

Get to Know Greg Wells, an Adult in Royer-Greaves’ Day Program *continued*

“Greg advocates for himself, and he can make choices,” said his mom, Yarrow. “If you give him choices, he’ll squeeze your hand so that you keep moving down the list until you reach the selection he wants.” Greg can follow directions in the multiple languages of his caregivers, which makes Yarrow amazed and proud. “I would love to know everything he knows!” she said admiringly.



Greg now lives in a local group home and spends every weekday with peers and staff at Royer-Greaves’ Adult Training Facility. Born prematurely in Lock Haven, PA, Greg was exposed to too much oxygen in the incubator and lost his sight, Yarrow said. He has developmental disabilities. He was verbal until he was 18 months old and while he has not had a formal diagnosis, Yarrow believes he is likely also autistic. His family moved to Paoli when he was six so he could attend a school for blind children.

When Greg neared puberty, he also began having seizures and at times, he would lash out at others. His mom and his late father, Roy, made the painful decision to place him in an institution, which was then considered the best practice.

Yarrow and Greg met Marcia Debes, now Royer-Greaves Services director of Lifesharing licensing compliance, when she worked elsewhere and helped Greg and his family with the transition from the institution to a group home in the 1980s. Marcia hadn’t seen them for decades when Greg started coming to Royer-Greaves’ day program in 2015.

“I just started talking to him, and I could tell he knew who I was,” Marcia said. “He reached out to me, and he let me hold onto him. And he continues to respond to me whenever I see him (at the A.T.F.). Greg is able to develop long-lasting relationships.”

In addition to the bond he has with people at Royer-Greaves, his mom, his grandparents, and his siblings, Greg is very

close to his swim coach, muscle therapist Glenn Kenny. They have known each other for 20 years, and Glenn has coached Greg in swimming and exercise for 10 of them.

Greg can be grumpy, grouchy, and even somewhat pushy, especially with strangers. Those who know him best say this is the way he protects himself. In the institution and in various group homes where he’s lived in the past, he encountered many different staff members. Some of them were cruel.

“He has his guard up at first,” Glenn said.

Greg will also sometimes act out in frustration if he can’t make

someone understands what he wants, or if he hears people talking about him, but not to him, add Yarrow and Marcia.

In recent years, he’s developed physical disabilities that make it

harder for him to move. Movement is good for him, so Glenn encourages exercise when they meet each week. When the pool at the YMCA is closed, Glenn uses Greg’s fondness for ice cream to urge him to walk a little bit farther around the mall.

Greg spends every weekday at Royer-Greaves, where he participates in music, physical education, different table-top activities, day trips, and much more. His love of music shined at the recent Royer-Greaves spring concert, where he enthusiastically played a bucket drum.

“I can only say that without the Royer-Greaves day program, Greg would probably be sitting in a chair at his group home all day,” Yarrow said. “It’s a very structured routine, and so he loves going there.”

Whether at the Y or at Royer-Greaves, the pool is Greg’s favorite place to be. He revels in the ease of buoyancy, smiling as he floats and rolls in the water.



Getting to Know Greg

- Introduce yourself when he is with someone he knows well.
- Speak directly to him, not about him to someone else. He feels as slighted by being discussed instead of addressed as any person does.

- If he needs help answering – or if you need help understanding his answers – the person who already knows him will help.
- Give him a little extra space.
- If he doesn’t respond much the first time, don’t take it personally, and please try again.

Professional Musicians, Singers, and Dancers Help Royer-Greaves Students and Adults Prepare for Spring Concert

Royer-Greaves students and adults spent all spring studying with professional musicians and dancers from two non-profit organizations dedicated to bringing music and dance to students of all abilities across Greater Philadelphia: Dancing Classrooms Philly and Musicopia.

With the guidance of these artists-in-residence and the assistance of their own teachers and aides, the students and adults have played percussion on buckets-turned-drums, belted out tunes made popular by performers from Katy Perry to Bob Marley, and moved their bodies or their wheels to merengue, salsa, fox trot, hip hop and waltz. On May 18, the students and adults and the artists-in-residence were accompanied by an orchestra of Musicopia musicians for the spring concert, "Dancing, Drumming, & Singing."



More than 200 people attended the event, and audience and performers alike had an amazing time. The pre-show preparations were just as fun, and also fit neatly into the students' and adults' curriculum and goals.

Singing, dancing, and drumming all require focus and following directions, skills that are important components of Royer-Greaves education programs, said Physical Education Teacher Ryan Mason. The mental and physical rigors of performance leave students and adults relaxed and calm, Royer-Greaves Music Director and Therapist Suzanne Kane noted.

The Magic of Movement

At dance time, Royer-Greaves students or adults were each paired with a staff member or aide – many of whom were also learning some of these dances for the first time. Modifications made for those who use wheelchairs allow everyone to dance together, said Kane.

Dancing is an enjoyable way for students and adults to practice following instructions and work on their coordination and social skills. "No matter who you are – an outgoing person or a shy one – and regardless of your abilities, people like to move," Mason said. "Music gives our students and adults an outlet to move expressively."

In every school where Dancing Classrooms Philly offers its programming, dancing allows students and teachers to interact with each other in a new way, which can strengthen relationships, said DCP Managing Director Kate Lombardi.



Dancing Classrooms Philly instructor Debbie Lynch – known by her students as Miss Debbie, dances with the students at times, holding the hands of those who use wheelchairs while their aides help with the turns and spins.



Voices and Bucket Drumming

Percussionist and Musicopia Teaching Artist Leon Jordan Sr. has toured and recorded with some of the biggest names in jazz and R&B, from Lou Rawls to Chaka Kahn. He founded and leads Philadelphia's Renaissance Orchestra. And his work with special needs students and brain injured adults has been recognized by the Pennsylvania Council of the Arts and duplicated nationally.



This spring at Royer-Greaves, he began by teaching students and adults to identify which locations on a bucket produce certain sounds. He supported and encouraged them to the point where they can experience the magic of performing as an ensemble. "Matching synchronization is a way they can communicate with each other even if they are non-verbal," he said. "I can see it happening. I can identify by their reactions that they know when a rhythm is starting to line up. And it is motivating for them when they can hear that other members of the ensemble are starting to get it."



Singer Songwriter and Musicopia Teaching Artist Alexandra Day performs with Renaissance Orchestra, plays other gigs around the region, and teaches private voice and piano students through her studio, The Music Dispatch.

When working with a group that has some non-verbal members, Day chooses songs that have vocalizations that aren't words, such as Katy Perry's "Roar."

In most ways, teaching vocal music to students and adults with disabilities doesn't differ much from teaching those without. "A lot of kids have been told they can't sing,

regardless of what their disabilities or abilities are," Day said. "They all need a lot of encouragement."





Volunteers Needed

Are you or your organization looking for a way to make a difference? We could use your help! Please call Vicky Mayer at 610-644-1810.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Vanguard Volunteers Bring the Muscle, Share the Music with Royer-Greaves



Volunteer Spotlight

Royer-Greaves highlights the contributions of our volunteers in our Volunteer Spotlight. A past issue featured manager trainees from Sherwin Williams. Coming Spotlights will shine on the Lions and Leo Lions, Keller Williams, and more organizations and individuals who go the extra mile to support our students and adults.

A team of Vanguard volunteers brought the muscle, and Royer-Greaves School for Blind students and adults made the music during a spring afternoon of clean-up and connection at our Paoli campus.

Royer-Greaves School was selected for the March 28 Day of Service by Vanguard's Women's Initiative for Leadership and Success (WILS). The 19 women and men who donated their time learned about Royer-Greaves School for Blind's mission and programs during lunch, then got right to work.

The volunteers hauled old furniture, cabinets, outdated electronic equipment, and more from a former dormitory, then sorted the pieces for recycling or reuse. The emptied building is now ready for future improvements in support of program needs. And, thanks to the creative and environmentally friendly suggestion of the Vanguard team, two regional animal rescue programs benefited as well: they are receiving old blankets and bed linens for their shelters.

The Vanguard volunteers also spent time reading children's books to Royer-Greaves' younger students – an activity enjoyed by all participants.

The day ended with the Vanguard crew joining Royer-Greaves' students, adults, faculty, staff, and families for a celebration capping off National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

The entire Royer-Greaves School for Blind community was thrilled and thankful to have the Vanguard volunteer team help us. Sharing their collective time and talent was a great resource for Royer-Greaves, and we look forward to collaborating with Vanguard's staff on other projects in the future."

