

The Royer-Greaves COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Fall/Winter 2022

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Visit our [website](http://www.royer-greaves.org) to learn more about Royer-Greaves.

Dear Royer-Greaves Community,

Who doesn't love a good puzzle? Some can be solved with ease whereas, others require careful deliberation and strategy. Sometimes life hands us puzzles that must be solved. These puzzles are often complex; the pieces are hard to place and, at an initial glance, the challenges that lay before us seem unresolvable...until we ask for help.

This issue of "Community Connection" celebrates the complex puzzles we have been able to solve because of the creativity, leadership and loving support of our families, staff and community.

A momentous renovation at Peyton Hall was made more manageable because of our flexible and helpful teachers and maintenance staff.

As we mark the one-year anniversary of the A.T.F. program's return to campus following 18 months of in-home programming during the pandemic, we celebrate the bold puzzle solvers who made it all possible – our A.T.F. staff.

Still the solutions to other puzzles – such as how to expand our sensory garden on campus – are highlighted, as are the exemplary people which support our programs through educational excellence, volunteerism, donations and so much more.

Read on and enjoy!



Executive
Director
VICKY MAYER



Deputy
Director
DEBRA JEROME

Lessons Learned from Pandemic Teamwork: ATF Celebrates Anniversary of Return to Campus



Think back to March 2020 and you will recall that Pennsylvania was hit with program cancellations, school closures and tremendous uncertainty. Few realize that while the state grappled with program shutdowns by the hundreds, Royer Greaves' Adult Training Facility (A.T.F.) day program

did not miss a beat. In fact, it transformed its robust schedule into a home-based model.

As the A.T.F. celebrates the one-year anniversary of its physical return to Royer-Greaves campus, the time seems right to highlight the adaptable and creative steps staff took to keep the A.T.F. going strong through the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was a period in time I will never forget," recalls Deputy Director Debra Jerome. "When Pennsylvania's governor called for a state shutdown, the thing we needed to do was take a careful look at how we might be able to maintain the A.T.F. day program in a way that would be safe for all."

Royer-Greaves was fortunate in that the 15 program participants were centralized within four spacious residential homes, all owned by Royer-Greaves. This meant that these adults would not

experience the isolation that was so prevalent for others during the pandemic. It also meant they each had a "home base" where day programming could be provided.

But who would run that programming? Prior to the pandemic, the A.T.F. was staffed by a talented and creative team that would work with these 15 adults, most blind, on campus eight hours each day. A strong bond had been built over the years between program participants and staff. Would staff members be willing to enter the residential homes during the height of the pandemic and run full-day programming?

"I knew that in order for this to work, I must lead by example," said Jerome. "So, I geared up with personal protective equipment, a mask and booties and went to every house to speak with every staff member on how we could make an in-home A.T.F. program run successfully."

Jerome and ATF Supervisor Domnic Odida were thrilled with the responses. "Everyone was very receptive and eager to make it work. They knew that by my being there and coming into homes every day, it showed them that I would not put them in a situation that I would put myself in," Jerome recalls.

(continued on page 2)

Sensory Experiences Are Blooming Across Campus at Royer-Greaves



American Poet Edna St. Vincent Millay once wrote “I will be the gladdest thing under the sun! I will touch a hundred flowers and not pick one.”



The joyful sensory experience that gardens bring to people has blossomed into a new campus-wide adventure thanks to an inspirational faculty member and a local landscaper.

Back in the spring, Director of Education Dr. Carolyn Muller visited the Brooklyn

Botanical Gardens and was overcome with how the gardens evoked her senses everywhere she walked.

“I became inspired to extend the joy our students and adult program participants get from Royer-Greaves’ contained

garden plot into an expansive campus-wide sensory garden experience,” Muller recalls.

She came back to campus committed to do just that. Through the assistance of Brandywine Designs, Water Crest Farms Nursery and countless hours of gardening support from local volunteers, the vision for a campus-wide sensory garden is now a reality. Plants, flowers and fruit trees have been selected for their tactical, olfactory or tasting experiences and planted in strategic places along the core circle of the buildings where they could be experienced. Results have been remarkable.

“Now, everywhere our students and adults walk, they experience something wonderful,” explains Muller.

Gardenias and honeysuckles have been planted along the fence to appeal to the sense of smell. Evergreens and river birches planted along the back of the patio support the sense of touch. Apple, cherry, and peach trees, when in full bloom, will provide delicious fruit to taste.

Musical instruments will also be installed among the gardens, so students can make and hear music. A walk outside is now a sensory adventure!



As the seasons have progressed, volunteers have come out in droves to keep the campus gardens beautiful and tidy.

“We have been so fortunate to have so much community support behind this project and so many projects that occur during the year on Royer Greaves’ campus,” says Executive Director Vicky Mayer.

To stay abreast of future volunteer opportunities, visit the Royer-Greaves website at www.royer-greaves.org

Lessons Learned from Pandemic Teamwork

(Continued from front)

In the comfort of the four residential homes, programming flowed seamlessly. Outdoor yards were used for picnics, dance parties, speed walking and nature hikes. Music therapy was delivered over Zoom, and Zoom also enabled the 15 A.T.F. participants to reunite virtually for games and other activities. “Our staff was incredibly creative with their programming,” said Executive Director Vicky Mayer.

Program participants even got to attend a drive-through prom, held by the Tim Tebow Foundation in conjunction with EpicChurch.

COVID safety protocols were followed and updated continuously according to CDC guidelines. All staff wore PPE and masks daily, and residents practiced and became comfortable with daily mask wearing as well. Surfaces were sanitized hourly. When vaccines became available, most staff and program participants received them.

As the pandemic’s impact began to wane regionally in 2021, a return to campus began to seem possible. Again, the A.T.F. team went into planning mode. To prepare program participants for the transition, the A.T.F. would travel to Royer-Greaves for walks on campus and to swim in the pool.

“We wanted to help make the full-time return to campus as smooth as possible,” stressed Jerome.

That happy day came in September 2021. Reflecting back on this unprecedented period in the A.T.F. program’s history, Mayer reaffirms what she knew since day one.

“This program would never have survived without our A.T.F. staff and leadership. These people are everything,” Mayer also expressed sincere gratitude to Odida for working so closely with the families of A.T.F. adults who did not live in the shared residences, to ensure that they stayed “connected” to all online programs and activities. “We are blessed to have the team that we do.”

Lifesharing Profile: Mary M., Mary Kyle & Rennie



Mary Kyle and Mary M. were united as a Lifesharing family several years ago. Since they found each other, the two Marys – along with Mary's Aunt Rennie – have bonded in many ways.

It's safe to say that Mary has gained countless new experiences and skills through her Lifesharing partnership with Mary Kyle.

"Living with Mary and Rennie has changed my life," Mary explained. "I do things that I might have never done. They include me in almost everything that they do."

Through the guidance of Mary Kyle, Mary has become highly involved in many aspects of her Coatesville community. She is active in her church's bible study, participates in a bowling league, has assisted with food delivery for Instacart customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, helps with community clean up and much more.

She's even used her voice to stand up for issues she feels strongly about. Mary attended a meeting at City Hall for a proposed apartment unit – she was protesting the initiative as she wanted to protect deer, trees and grass. She also volunteered with a PA House of Representatives campaign.

Besides participating in various community efforts and initiatives, she's attended many social events – road trips to see family in Virginia, gatherings for Eagles games, a First Edition concert where she was dancing in the aisles, and even went with Mary Kyle to her high school reunion!

Arguably most notable, Mary, a huge fan of the Michigan State University Spartans basketball team, traveled all the way to the Bahamas to watch the team play in the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament. During her visit, she squeezed in an opportunity to swim with dolphins!

A Win-Win Relationship

And Mary Kyle's desire to find a deeper connection through sharing her home through foster care has certainly been fulfilled. Having someone to drop off at work and spend time inside and outside her home has given her more purpose.

"I don't just get off work and aimlessly walk around malls and find ways to pass the time," she explained.

As for Rennie, whose only child passed away many years ago, her relationship with Mary has given her an opportunity to share the gift of her maternal instinct.

"Mary has been like a granddaughter to me," Rennie explains. "Her presence is a blessing. She is helpful, funny and kind. She is simply a joy to have around and is everything I would think a granddaughter should be."

Mary Kyle, Rennie and Mary's family and friends provide Mary with tools, information, direction and advice to assist Mary in making important short- and long-term decisions. Mary has adopted a healthier lifestyle, and with the help of Mary Kyle, made the decision to have foot surgery. The surgery was ultimately a success as Mary followed all the protocols for proper healing. Mary is thankful for her Lifesharing partnership, being able to live the best everyday life she can, and the bond she's established with Mary Kyle and Rennie.

"It's like I have another big sister and a grandma who not just take care of me," but enjoy spending time with me" Mary said. "I love the bond that we all have and I want to live with them for the rest of my life."



Your 2022 Donation is Needed to Support Our Mission

Royer-Greaves School for Blind is a non-profit, private school serving students and adults with visual and other impairments, including profound intellectual and physical disabilities.

Our mission is to ensure that the students and adults who are part of the Royer-Greaves family receive education, training and therapeutic services tailored to meet their individual needs and preferences so that they may lead the most fulfilling and independent lives possible.

This year, we implemented many initiatives to make certain our school, Adult Training Facility Program (A.T.F.) and residential group homes

have the resources and staffing they need to support the delivery of our mission. This has included physical renovations, equipment purchases and long-overdue staff compensation increases.

Our work is far from over and with each new student or A.T.F. participant comes the potential for new supports or accommodations. Can we count on you? Your donation is tax-deductible and needed now more than ever. No donation is too small.

Please visit <https://royer-greaves.org/donate-volunteer/>

Prefer to Donate by Mail?

☐ **Yes, I want to make an impact!** Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____ payable to Royer-Greaves School for Blind.

- ☐ \$50 **Touch a Life**
☐ \$100 **Enrich a Life**
☐ \$250 **Empower a Life**
☐ \$500 **Change a Life**
☐ Other _____

By Credit Card:

☐ MC ☐ VISA ☐ AMEX

Credit Card #: _____

Exp. Date: _____ CVV Code: _____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Detach form and mail with your check to:

Royer-Greaves School for Blind

118 South Valley Road
Paoli, PA 19301

Peyton Hall Renovations Improve Student Accessibility and Safety



A comprehensive facilities renovation within Peyton Hall has brought positive changes to student experiences within the building which houses classrooms on Royer-Greaves' campus. Built in 1960, the two-story building's interior has been revamped to support the school's commitment

to providing an innovative educational environment that meets current and projected space, layout and design standards.

Three small elementary classrooms have been reconfigured into one large learning room, a transformation that allows for greater ease of movement for students requiring mobility equipment or support from in-room therapists. Numerous concrete walls, were removed in order to achieve the new open-space learning environment. Similar renovations and improvements are in the strategic plan for the Perry Building.

Through the collaboration of vision staff, professional staff and Salus University faculty members, new flooring was created and installed with a color and contrast system that helps students with low vision identify boundaries and limit the risk of falling. All new flooring is now pale gray; baseboards are black, signaling walls to be avoided. Doors, which have been widened to 36 inches to support wheelchair usage, are painted bright red with black frames.

"This contrasted paint system fosters familiarity and greater independence among students who can differentiate visual contrasts," says Dr. Carolyn Muller, Director of Education.

Thanks to a grant from PECO, lights have been replaced with LED

lighting allowing for greater brightness. Still another grant, provided by the federal government, has equipped Peyton Hall and all buildings on campus with a state-of-the-art security system which employs a FOB system to safeguard all who work and learn on the Royer-Greaves campus.

Outside of Peyton Hall, another major improvement has been implemented. A walkway has been constructed at the school's entrance, enabling students to walk outside without having to navigate the steep hill that, up until now, has been the only outdoor thoroughfare.

Students benefiting from the Peyton Hall renovation are not limited to those enrolled in Royer-Greaves. Through a contract with the Chester County Intermediate Unit (CCIU), an additional five rooms on the lower level of Peyton Hall are being used for students who need CCIU services.

According to Muller, these remarkable improvements made at Peyton Hall could have never happened without the adaptability and good humor of the school's teachers and the invaluable help of the maintenance staff team.



"We asked a lot of our teachers during this process. They shifted from class to class, and even from classrooms to the gym," she says. They were always willing to make changes and now we all get to benefit from a new and improved Peyton Hall."



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