

Summer 2023

# The Royer-Greaves COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Vol. 7, No. 1

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

## Dear Royer-Greaves Community,

Spring is the season of growth and all things fresh and new, and we have had a truly special spring at Royer-Greaves. We enjoyed many opportunities to grow together and learn new things, and in this newsletter, you will find a few stories that illustrate just what we mean.

- Happy Fifth “Share-iversary” to Lifesharing participant Victoria and her host Senneh – the first members of the Royer-Greaves Lifesharing Program family! Their remarkable relationship is an inspiring part of our important and growing Lifesharing Program.
- Royer-Greaves recently began a new series called Lunch and Learn. Our second of these mid-day presentations featured an uplifting and inspiring message from Dr. Kerry Magro – a nationally renowned speaker, author, and disabilities advocate who was himself non-speaking at age 2 and diagnosed with autism at age 4.
- Our students and adults benefit from many partnerships Royer-Greaves has within the community. This was clearly evident in two wonderful spring performances: “Journey into

the Middle East” and “A Royer-Greaves Magical Adventure,” the culmination of the work of our students and adults, Royer-Greaves Music Therapist Suzanne Kane-Filshill, and three incredible community organizations, Musicopia, Dancing Classrooms Philly, and People’s Light.

- Have you ever been completely charmed by a baby goat? Teacher Cindy Zimmerman arranged for a special surprise visit from Murph. Our students not only loved it, but using their senses of touch, smell, and hearing, they developed a concrete idea of what a goat is, building on knowledge gained from a previous visit to Steinmetz Family Farm.

Interested in learning more, please visit our website at [www.Royer-Greaves.org](http://www.Royer-Greaves.org) or call us at 610-644-1810 to ask questions or arrange a campus visit.



Executive  
Director  
**VICKY MAYER**



Deputy  
Director  
**DEBRA JEROME**

## Awareness is Not Enough: Disabilities Advocate Dr. Kerry Magro on Empowerment & Advocacy



Front row: Royer-Greaves Executive Director Vicky Mayer  
 Back row, left to right: Lifesharing Program Specialist Lauren Jenkins, Director of Lifesharing Marcia Debes, Royer-Greaves Deputy Executive Director Debra Jerome, Kerry Magro

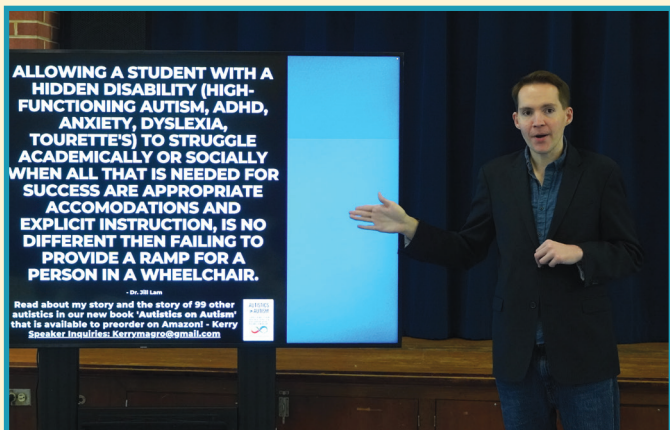
Disability awareness is not enough for the disabled community, advocate and author Dr. Kerry Magro told the Royer-Greaves staff, parents, and community members gathered for a May 11 Lunch and Learn event. “In 2023, we need to turn disability awareness into disability acceptance,” he said.

Kerry, who could not speak at age 2.5 and was diagnosed with autism at age 4, has built a career as a professional speaker and author. He founded a non-profit and is a Netflix disabilities consultant. But when Kerry was a kid in school, it didn’t matter so much whether other kids knew about disabilities, he said. “I wanted someone to sit with me in the lunchroom and be my friend.”

Kerry said the most important way to be an ally and a friend to a person with a disability is to ask questions about what they need and want. When he was 19, people who learned that he had autism would talk slower, which frustrated him. “They were thinking they were doing the right thing, but they were not meeting me where I was,” he said. It’s important to ask those who have a disability about the language they prefer, too, he added. “Some people in our community will prefer identity-first language,” he said. For example, he said, many find power in the term “autistic person.”

Kerry noted that there is a wide range of capabilities within the disabled community. About 40% of autistic individuals in the United States are either non-speaking or non-verbal, he said. “Some may not be able to speak or answer to their name, but they are still able to hear your words and feel your kindness,” he said.

*Cont’d on page 2*



Kerry also offered practical advice for the parents of and advocates for people with disabilities. While not everyone can advocate for themselves, it is essential that those who can be empowered and encouraged to do so, he said. Far too many disabled people struggle academically or socially “when all they needed was appropriate accommodations,” he said.

Sharing a child’s diagnosis with them as early as possible is an important step, Kerry said, because self-awareness is key to self-advocacy. Kerry offered other practical advice for parents and advocates, including:

- If your child is non-verbal, place the focus on communication, not speech.
- Realize you need a community, and build one in-person or online.

- Get respite support and take breaks when you need them.
- Start saving for your child’s future and teach them to save for their own future.
- Encourage physical activity.
- Support and seek out peer mentorship programs that link disabled and non-disabled people.

“Dr. Magro’s presentation was inspirational,” said Royer-Greaves Executive Director Vicky Mayer. “We are so glad he came, and so grateful to the sponsors who made this event possible:

**BMC Benefit Services, The Communication Solutions Group, iPATH Cloud Solutions, Malvern Bank, and PDC Pharmacy.**

**Royer-Greaves**  
 SCHOOL FOR BLIND

Thank you to our supporting sponsors,  
who made the May 11 Lunch & Learn  
with Dr. Kerry Magro possible.

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## Magical, Musical Spring Performances

The musical and theatrical talents of Royer-Greaves students and adults were evident all spring, with several performances put on with the help of our partners Musicopia, Dancing Classrooms Philly, and People’s Light.

In April, a collaboration with Musicopia yielded “Journey Into the Middle East,” a celebration of culture and song. Then in May, our work with Dancing Classrooms Philly and People’s Light culminated in our Spring Show, which included solos from Royer-Greaves students, a multitude of dances, and “A Royer-Greaves Magical Adventure.” The adventure featured the story of Royer-Greaves students who discovered a scroll created by students from 100 years ago, leading them on a hunt for treasure.



# Royer-Greaves Kids Befriend a Kid of a Different Kind – Murph the Baby Goat



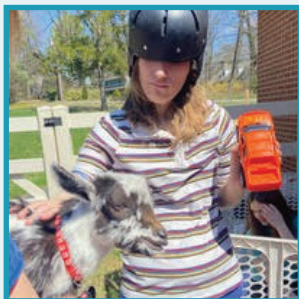
Royer-Greaves students recently welcomed a furry, cuddly, and talkative kid to campus – a baby goat named Murph.

Students' smiled and laughed as they ran their fingers through Murph's soft fur, walked him down the hallway on a leash, and mostly, snuggled with the friendly little ruminant. Teacher Cindy Zimmerman arranged for Murph to travel to Royer-Greaves from his home at Steinmetz Family Farm. The fun surprise for her students was also a learning experience that allowed them to gain a solid understanding of what a goat really is, she said.



Royer-Greaves students have visual impairment, along with other disabilities. None of them live on a farm. Prior to Murph's arrival, students learned about goats in class, but that lesson was brought to life by time spent with Murph, Cindy said.

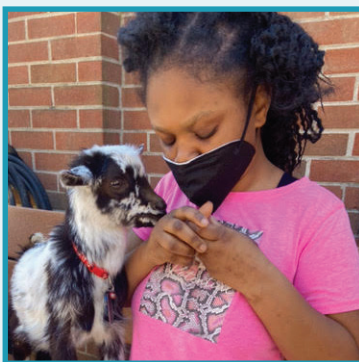
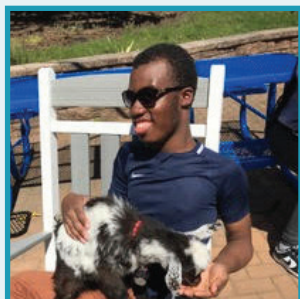
"The word 'goat' is very abstract if you can't see one," she said. "The students got to feel the goat's fur, and experience his gentle nibbling of their fingers, and hear the sounds he makes. They got to learn what a goat smells like. They now have a real understanding of what a goat is."



Cindy decided to rent some time with Murph based on how much her students loved and learned from a December excursion to the Steinmetz Family farm in December, when they were able to interact with goats, turkeys and a pig. "Justin and Lauren, the owners, did not charge the school for that great trip," Cindy said, appreciatively.

She hopes to soon bring her students back to the farm to visit with this season's baby animals.

"This is such a positive, real-world experience," she said. "My students learn many things at the farm that they can't learn from a book."





## HAPPY SHARE-AVERSARY *Victoria & Senneh!*

## Royer-Greaves' First Lifesharing Match Marks Five Years Together



When her daughter left for college, Senneh Sengbe's home grew far too quiet. Wanting to do something meaningful with the extra space in her home and heart, Senneh opened both to Victoria, who needed a little support.

Victoria and Senneh became the first match of the Royer-Greaves Lifesharing Program, a residential option for adults who do not have all the skills they need to live independently but can thrive as part of a caring household that receives

training and support from Royer-Greaves.

On July 18, the women – who now consider each other family – will celebrate five years together.

During that time, Victoria's confidence has skyrocketed. She excels at her job with Royer-Greaves housekeeping, which she loves.

Senneh, who also works at Royer-Greaves as a direct support professional, reports that her home is no longer quiet.

"People always ask me, 'Is she your daughter?' I say, 'Yes, she is my daughter,' because she is part of the family now," said Senneh. "I just like to see her live a great life, as she keeps a smile on my face."

"I have two families!" said Victoria, who remains close to her family of origin, especially her twin sister.

All of Royer-Greaves is celebrating the milestones.

"The love, support, and growth we have witnessed with Victoria and Senneh is amazing for all of us," said Director of Lifesharing Marcia Debes. "It is hard to believe that Lifesharing will be celebrating five years of success since they were matched." During the past five years, Royer-Greaves Lifesharing has provided support to 13 different individuals and their Lifesharer, she noted.

"Victoria and Senneh are living proof that Lifesharing transforms lives," said Royer-Greaves Executive Director Vicky Mayer. "I couldn't be happier for them, or more proud of our program, which has helped many others achieve their most rewarding and independent lives."

The demand for Lifesharing is strong, and Royer-Greaves seeks additional Lifesharer hosts, who receive training, on-going support, a stipend, and more. Visit [www.royer-greaves.org/lifesharing](http://www.royer-greaves.org/lifesharing) to learn more.



## Do you have Extra Room in Your Home & Extra Space in

### *Become a Royer-Greaves Services Lifesharing Family*

Lifesharing matches people and families who have room in their homes and hearts with people who have intellectual disabilities and want to become part of an extended family.

Lifesharing individuals participate in everyday family and community life. If you become a family living provider, you will create a true sense of home for the Lifesharing person and assist them with acquiring, maintaining, or improving the skills necessary to live in the community and live more independently.

It's not just Lifesharers who benefit from this arrangement. Family living providers gain a new friend who feels like family, become more involved in the community, and receive a stipend.

### *What supports do Lifesharing providers receive?*

Royer-Greaves Services provides training related to daily life, diagnosis, needs and interests of the Lifesharing individual. We provide support with integrating the person into your household and family dynamics and assistance with the coordination of the Lifesharer's health care. We help coordinate substitute care for the Lifesharing person when you cannot provide it.

Providers receive a stipend once a month to cover service and room and board. The Lifesharing person's income and benefits cover their own medical expenses and personal purchases.

### *All Kinds of Households Succeed at Lifesharing, Including Yours.*

No special experience is needed to become a provider; training and support are provided by Royer-Greaves Services.

Family living providers include people of all ages, genders, races, nationalities, and religious beliefs – just like Lifesharing participants.

Providers have every household structure: Single people, single parents with children, couples, families with children at home and families whose children now have homes of their own.

If your family already includes a member with an intellectual disability, The Royer-Greaves Services Lifesharing program can provide you with additional support and resources.

## Your Heart.



***Open Your Home. Open Your Heart. Become a Royer-Greaves Lifesharing Family.***

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about Lifesharing:  
Contact the Lifesharing office at 610-644-1810 • Visit [royer-greaves.org/lifesharing](http://royer-greaves.org/lifesharing)