As RHD celebrated its annual Martin Luther King Day of Service, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney stopped by RHD’s Opportunity Place to check in on a painting and refurbishing project. Opportunity Place supports men experiencing homelessness.

Mayor Kenney spent time with each individual at the program, shook every hand, posed for every photo, and helped add to a very meaningful day for everyone there.

“The people here are doing what Dr. King wanted us to do — get each other’s back, take care of each other, look out for each other,” Mayor Kenney said. “Some people have had difficult times in life, and bringing a little justice and a little happiness to them really makes a difference.”

RHD has always devoted Martin Luther King Day to community service, hosting a number of events across the country, from makeovers at local programs to community food distributions, coat and toiletry drives, commemorative marches and much more.

One of the residents at Opportunity Place asked Mayor Kenney for his thoughts on MLK Day, and he graciously shared his thoughts for a video with him. You can watch the video and see more from RHD’s MLK Day of Service at: www.rhd.org/mlk

Opportunity Place: Sandra Cox-Scales, Executive Vice President of RHD’s Philadelphia Behavioral Health & Housing Division; Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney and RHD CEO Dyann Roth help out at RHD’s MLK Day of Service.

Toy Story

RHD Rhode Island artists with intellectual disabilities got a chance to work alongside toy designers from Hasbro, one of the world’s leading toymakers, in a series of toy-making workshops — with extraordinary results. See story, page 4.
RHD’s United Peers shares journey of recovery in WHY? documentary

A production meeting broke out suddenly as Sheila and Brenda discussed how to begin filming the next segment of their documentary. Glenn Holsten, the award-winning documentary filmmaker, listened to the discussion in the Why? studio and said: “Well, that’s the process — it all about the choices you want to make. It’s your choice.” Sheila Hall Pfleiderer is the director of RHD United Peers, which supports people in recovery from mental health challenges in a community inclusion program staffed by Certified Peer Specialists. Brenda Lewis began as a member of United Peers, gained her CPR certification and is now a WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) facilitator. Their biggest choice was the decision to tell their story as part of the OC87 Recovery Diaries series, which features stories of mental health recovery created by and for people who are still on their journeys. When they were accepted into the program at WHY?, Sheila and Brenda learned filmmaking and editing so they could tell their story themselves.

“When I first sat down in front of the editing board, it looked like Greek,” Sheila said. “I thought, oh my gosh, what have I gotten myself into? The only experience I had was taking pictures on my phone. It was fun for a while, but it was scary.”

Holsten and WHY? Youth Media Instructor Sarah Milinski lent their support in helping Sheila and Brenda tell their story, but their touch in the film is very light. Sheila and Brenda receive technical assistance and some basic filmmaking instruction, but the documentary will tell the story of Brenda’s journey of trauma and recovery at United Peers in all its stages.

“In the beginning, it was really scary,” Brenda said. “There’s so much I could talk about — trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and abuse … and it’s like: Are you sure? And the answer was: Yes, say it, talk about it. It’s freeing.”

“I never walked in and felt: I got this. But I always felt I was learning and I was growing. I loved walking in every day and saying: Teach me something. It was a great, great experience. It was fun.”

United Peers uses Certified Peer Specialists to assist patients in recovery as they work to live as independently as possible, demonstrating and modeling recovery through education and their own lived experiences. United Peers grew out of RHD’s commitment to using Certified Peer Specialists in its programs. At RHD, Certified Peer Specialist is a credential, not a job description. It is a professional role that is transforming RHD behavioral health services. RHD maintains the integrity of the Peer Support model with full-time Peer Specialist Coordinators responsible for providing technical assistance and support.

RHD works to develop the roles and responsibilities of Peers in direct services, being mindful of the variety of skills Peers possess and the career trajectory of a Peer workforce. Brenda’s story not only shows the impact of peer support, it made for exciting — and occasionally cathartic — filmmaking.

Brenda coped with trauma through art. When she completed a piece, she would put it away — and avoided looking at it again. But for this film, she brought out a number of pieces and hung them on a wall. On film, she talked about each piece, what it meant and why she did it. “It was the first time I’ll look at them in years,” Brenda said. “I was scared. But when I did, it felt like a weight just fell off my shoulders.”

“Watching her has been amazing,” Sheila said. “I hadn’t been easy, but to see her get through it, no matter what, has given me encouragement. “We all need our members all the time: You can do anything you want. I wanted her to be able to see what I see. If she sees it on film, she’ll know how awesome she is.”

Their film debuts this summer. And then, as Brenda said, “Once you do this, it’s out there. There’s no taking it back.” “I hope people take away that if Brenda can do it, so can I,” Sheila said. “And that I am not my diagnosis. PTSD doesn’t have to make me a victim; I can still be a survivor.”

“The Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services honored RHD staff and programs with a number of awards and accolades during the Transformation Decade Celebration. Since 2005 the City of Philadelphia and DHD3S have been at the forefront of efforts to transform systems of care with an emphasis on recovery and resilience for behavioral health services, and self-determination for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

To commemorate Philadelphia’s 10-year anniversary of system transformation coincided the Transformation Decade, DHD3S hosted a series of events to celebrate those who played integral roles in the transformation of our system, and look toward the future. Sandy Vanooks, Director of the Office of Mental Health at DHD3S, paid an emotional tribute to the work done by many at RHD through the years.

“It’s an incredible group of people,” Vanooks said. “This is a long overdue celebration for RHD. It was 25 years ago when we were part of a team closing Philadelphia State Hospital, and hundreds of individuals were finally going to get a chance to keep going. So we formed the United Peers program. We felt like half the coldness was going to happen, but the other half had people who thought, somehow, that we could pull this off. And from the very beginning, right there, walking side by side every step of the way, was RHD.

“We were going into uncharted territory, doing things and trying things that had not been tried before anywhere in the country. There were transformation champions then — a group at RHD that always said, ‘Anything you need, we’ll try.’ There were, probably, too many failures. But there were so many successes. At the end of the process, we were always in it together, every step of the way.

“We closed the hospital down, and then the real work started — we had to build the system. We did a lot of things in a very short time. We knew it was working. We had to build opportunity, and we had to build community. RHD was there, rallying along, fighting for it. RHD persevered, through a lot of challenges, budgets, changes, neighborhood opposition that would have buried most people. It was an effort that was just unmatched, the dedication, the tenacity. RHD never quit. You are what formed and informed these past 10 years of transformation. For that, I am eternally grateful. RHD should know they have made, and will make, a difference every single day.”

RHD was honored with Distinguished Service Awards as Transformation Champions for their work at a number of RHD programs that support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, for working with partnerships such as the Journey of Hope Project, for working to create and implement an enhanced clinical platform at RHD programs, and for shaping trauma-informed care at RHD programs for clients and staff.

RHD’s FaSST/Connections, a behavioral health care unit that provides evaluation and coordination of services to individuals and families living in shelters, was honored with the Excellence in Service award. FaSST/Connections serves more than 600 people every year, and drew praise for demonstrating “the power of having a place of one’s own and having someone who cares in jumping an individual’s recovery.”

RHD supports 44 programs in Philadelphia that support people with behavioral health challenges or people with intellectual disabilities. RHD is honored to have played a part in the transformation of behavioral health and intellectual disability services in Philadelphia, exemplifying the transformation principles and supporting recovery, resilience, and self-determination.

“Hoops for Hope at RHD”

Among the many innovative projects at RHD’s Fa SST/Connections is the Hoops for Hope basketball league, which case manager Victoria Urban began as a project with RHD’s Leadership Development Program. The league has been so popular with men in various Philadelphia homeless shelters (including RHD FaSST) that FaSST/Connections agreed to sponsor the league and help Urban raise additional funds to keep it going.

“It’s been a huge success,” said Urban. “It helps me out of trouble, gives me purpose, helps me realize who am and gives me motivation to be a better person.”

Advisory, coaching support, and empowerment are key concepts of FaSST/Connections’ approach, and Urban said giving the men a place to play basketball and meet with friends helps keep them on track to get out of the shelter.

Many of the players in the league look forward to the Tuesday night games all week long. “We transfer get people here, because it keeps them out of trouble out there,” said Joe, a regular player. “I’m thankful for this opportunity; none of us take this for granted. It keeps guys focused and motivated. We’ve got a group of friends here.”
RHD Rhode Island works with toymakers from Hasbro in exciting collaboration

J翰ary Giles is a toy designer at Hasbro, one of the world’s leading toymakers and the company behind such legendary games as Monopoly, Yahtzee and Play-Doh. She has also become a big fan of an RHD Rhode Island artist named Holly.

“I really connected with her work,” Giles said. “We just clicked!”

Giles posed for pictures with Holly in front of the wall of artwork Holly had produced, with support and inspiration from Giles and a group of toy designers at Hasbro. It was part of “Don’t Play With Me Too,” a collaborative process art exhibit and concert featuring toy-inspired work conceived by RHD artists and interpreted by Hasbro toy designers and artists. The show was the result of an extraordinary few months in which RHD artists with intellectual disabilities worked alongside toy designers from Hasbro in a series of workshops led by Hasbro Toy Designer Ricky Katowicz.

“Everybody got so much out of it,” said Nate Carroll, RHD Rhode Island art coordinator. “It pushed our artists in different directions, and exposed them to a process they hadn’t seen before. The Hasbro designers in Ricky’s group were so generous with their time, and it was a great experience for our artists.”

Katowicz attended RHD Rhode Island’s annual Holiday Bazaar, which includes the work of every artist who attends the program and features the art and products they’ve worked on all year. RHD Rhode Island is a creative, fun, intellectually stimulating, art-based day program that serves people with developmental disabilities and provides family support services, community job development and supported employment services. The studio has developed a strong following in the local art community; Providence Mayor Jorge O. Elorza recently hosted RHD Rhode Island at the community Gallery at City Hall and RHD Rhode Island is regularly featured in some of the area’s most prominent shows and galleries.

Katowicz attended a Christmas art fair where artists from RHD Rhode Island were exhibiting. He met some of the artists and staff and was instantly captivated.

“I was totally blown away,” Katowicz said. “I went with a friend who was telling me: ‘You really have to see this. Well, I saw it, and I wrote down a note on my phone: ‘Get involved! I just knew immediately I had to be a part of what they’re doing.”

“I love art; I’m always trying to get back to that essence, take my control and my ‘adultness’ away from things. And I saw so much of that from the people here.”

Katowicz began by taking RHD artists on a tour of Hasbro, giving them a unique look behind the scenes of the world-famous toymaker.

Then he asked if he could run a toy-making workshop with the artists.

“Getting started was nerve-wracking. I mean, how to do it? But it turned out there was not much I needed to do. With this group, you just plant little seeds of ideas, and everybody picks it up and starts making. The one key ingredient that everybody at Hasbro is always pushing our artists in different directions, and exposed them to a process they hadn’t seen before. The point is to have our artists be part of our community.

“Whatever makes that work is community partners who appreciate what our artists are doing and want to support it. Ricky and his group are a great example of that, and we’re very grateful for their support — and that so many people enjoyed the results.”

Katowicz brought tugs of space toy parts from Hasbro, and the artists picked through them and started creating their own toys. In a particularly inspired session, Katowicz decided he could put voice chips in the toys, and brought a digital recorder to capture the artists’ voices and give life to their creation. David had built a mouse with the parts Katowicz made available (because it was a toy, and an original concept, this particular mouse could fly), and he delighted in the chance to give his creation some personality.

“I can’t make a swear — I’m a nice mouse!” David said into the recorder. And then “I don’t like baths … but some people do” and “Have you been to Boston? I have — it’s my hometown!”

When Katowicz played the recording back, and David’s mouse spoke with his voice, David said excitedly: “It’s really mine!”

At the “Don’t Play With Me Too” show, a standing-room-only crowd admired several pieces that came from, or were inspired by, those workshops — including The Noogilizer, a doll designed by Bill, an RHD Rhode Island artist, that Katowicz turned into a toy with muscular arms. “A super strongman that gives super painful muscle massages.” The evening also featured a Makerbot 3D printer on site, which scanned artwork from the workshops and produced original pieces to order.

At RHD Rhode Island, we’re committed to the idea that our artists are part of the arts community,” Wilson said. “We don’t bring people into a studio and have them stay there; the point is to have our artists be part of our community.

“Whatever makes that work is community partners who appreciate what our artists are doing and want to support it. Ricky and his group are a great example of that, and we’re very grateful for their support — and that so many people enjoyed the results.”

*Ricky Katowicz, Hasbro Toy Designer*
Self determination and the will to achieve

RHD Boston’s emotional presentation at advocacy conference shows: “Yes we can, we will achieve, we have a voice.”

Dyann Roth, CEO of Resources for Human Development

It was fitting that RHD Boston presented at MAIS (Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong) 2016 Annual Conference “Self Determination: The Will to Achieve” in front of almost 500 people. RHD Boston’s presentation is filled with people who have a will to achieve—clients like Jeremy who talked about his new job, and a woman, who talked about living independently, gave a presentation on advocating for themselves and received a standing ovation.

“I worked so hard,” said Christine, who fought to maintain custody of her son with support from RHD. “RHD was very helpful. Without them, I’d be lost. I hope people see this and how they can do what Lidia did—fight and get through it. It made me stronger.”

“Growing up, I heard: You can’t, you just can’t.” It was a different story for Jim, whose presentation and video testimonials from RHD’s clients and families about their experiences were shared.

Pauline has great relationships with the individuals we serve,” RHD Boston director Susan Burnham said. “She is a person who they trust and look to for guidance. Her passion for supporting people to advocate for the services they need and for the things they want to see is one of the most important services we provide. She’s someone who they can count on and rely on when they need guidance. She is a spokesperson for the people she serves. She is a leader in the community and her presence is felt throughout the agency.”

Van Ameringen Foundation supports veterans with generous gift to Healing Ajax peer support program for local veterans

“Van Ameringen Foundation is one of the most innovative winemakers in the world,” said James Drouhin, CEO of Maison Joseph Drouhin, as the honorary chair for the 2016 Main Line Wine Gala.”

Van Ameringen Foundation supports veterans with generous gift to Healing Ajax peer support program for local veterans

It’s veterans helping veterans, making sure their brothers and sisters don’t feel alone.” Healing Ajax offers peer support groups, in which veterans successfully develop self-care skills that allow them to get support from others who have experienced similar experiences.

RHD’s Coordinated Homeless Outreach Center gets help managing extreme weather conditions thanks to generous gift from First Niagara

Emergency weather conditions that swelled the Coordinated Homeless Outreach Center (CHOC) in Montgomery County to overflowing point will be a little easier to manage this year thanks to a generous gift from the First Niagara Bank Foundation. The gift of $25,000 will allow CHOC to expand its capacity and services during Code Blue (when cold weather during the winter creates dangerous conditions for the people living on the streets) and Code Red (when the summer heat reaches dangerous levels). Last year, in large part because of emergency weather conditions, CHOC operated at 170 percent of its capacity, and often disabled its capacity during the winter’s Code Blue warnings. When the county declares a Code Blue or Code Red, CHOC’s Outreach Team and local law enforcement help transport individuals to its CHOC.

Suspended Coffees founder John Sweeney visits RHD’s Fast&Sust Connections program and finds a place ‘where superheroes don’t wear capes’

John Sweeney, who founded Suspended Coffees and grew it into a worldwide movement, works to bring communities together and inspire people to take action. His efforts Islam, visited RHD’s Fast&Sust Connections at the invitation of director Ann Ryan and reported that she found a group of people “where superheroes don’t wear capes.”

“My mission is to make sure we grow this in every city,” said Sweeney. “RHD is one of the best places I’ve worked with because they always have a plan. They have an idea, they put the plan into action, and they make it happen.”

RHD’s Health Annex welcomed Joanne Grossi, Regional Director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to kick off an enrollment event for Health Care Marketplace Provider Week of Action, helping people enroll in and retain quality, affordable health coverage.

“We are doubling our work and the residents of Southwest Philadelphia are so fortunate to have you as a part of their community,” Grossi said. “Thank you for everything you’re doing every day to make the citizens in Pennsylvania healthier and happier. Federally Qualified Health Centers are serving the most vulnerable and most-need-citizens, and at Health and Human Services we’re so grateful for you do every day to make sure our population is healthy and happy and well cared for.”

“We’re really proud of where we are in enrollment in Pennsylvania, and we want to make sure every Pennsylvanian gets enrolled in Health Insurance if they haven’t already. One million Pennsylvanians have Health Insurance who didn’t have it before. We’re down to the last few hundred thousand; that’s our challenge. The uninsured rate in Pennsylvania is lower than seven percent right now, and I really need everyone to help out—if you have a friend, a neighbor, a family member, get them to these enrollment events and help them get the insurance they need.”

The Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers (PACHC) and RHD’s Family Practice and Counseling Network (FP&C) hosted the enrollment event to recognize Marketplace Provider Week of Action in January. Regional Director Grossi met with providers and other healthcare professionals to discuss best practices and concern regarding healthcare in 2016. This is the third year of enrollment events.

Health care providers are on the frontlines and are trusted sources of health information for communities.

“We work to address health and access disparities in all its forms, our staff here has done a tremendous job of getting people enrolled thanks to the Affordable Care Act and the Medicaid expansion,” said Health Annex director Kenneth Kauffman. “I’m very happy to say that over the last two years we’ve reduced the uninsured rate by almost 20 percent. That has given our patients more care, better care, and to see other people in our communities get this care is absolutely fantastic.”

The Health Annex is part of RHD’s Family Practice & Counseling Network, a network of health centers providing primary care, behavioral health education, prenatal care, family planning services, dental care, community outreach, and advocacy.

The nurse-managed centers are primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to serve primary health care for individuals who otherwise might not have access to health care.

In addition, RHD provides a network of Federal Health Centers in Allegheny and Western Pennsylvania.

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Congrats, Theo!

Theo Cameron, Operations Coordinator at RHD’s Womanspace Louisiana, was selected by ANCOR’s National Advocacy Campaign to receive the Louisiana Direct Support Professional Recognition Award for 2016. ANCOR (American Network of Community Options and Resources) received hundreds of nominations from across the country for this prestigious award. Womanspace Louisiana is a safe haven for women who are experiencing homelessness and are in recovery from mental health challenges and/or substance abuse.