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Newsletter - Spring 2023

Step By Step, Inc. appoints Joseph Sileo as Chief Administrative & Legal Affairs Officer

Step By Step is proud to announce **Attorney Joseph Sileo**, who most recently served as Senior Vice President and General Counsel for The Wright Center, has joined Step By Step, Inc. as **Chief Administrative & Legal Affairs Officer**.



experience representing both private and public employers across a broad range of industries, with a focus on management-side labor and employment law to include day-to-day counselling and representation of employers in administrative proceedings and more formal court litigation in connection with employment

Step shared: "We are very excited to have Joe as a member of Step By Step's leadership team. His years of experience in management, as well as a seasoned attorney, will serve our consumers, employees, and Step By Step extremely well."

Joseph has a Bachelor's Degree from The Pennsylvania State University and is a summa cum laude graduate of Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School. He lives in Clark Summit with his wife Sue and has two boys, Joseph and Jonathan.

Prior to The Wright Center, Joe was in private practice for more than 25 years, initially as an associate attorney and eventual partner with would ultimately become Ufberg Sileo Law in Scranton, followed by his tenure as of-counsel in charge of the McNees Wallace & Nurick Scranton law office. Joe has 30 years of

-related matters, as well as working with local municipalities (including as Solicitor for Newton Township for more than 20 years), regular pro bono legal representation, and frequent participation in speaking engagements on labor and employment law topics.

Congratulations and welcome Joseph, we are grateful to have you a part of our #1 caring team!

Eric Lindey, President/CEO of Step By

Luzerne Foundation Bestows Grant to Children's IDEA Program



Step By Step, Inc. received a \$5,000 grant for the **Northeast Childrens Behavioral Health's IDEA Program**, which provides evaluations and services to children newly diagnosed with Autism. **Suzanne Pickering**,

Program Director at Step By Step, did an amazing job presenting the program to the **Luzerne Foundation** who awarded the grant. The Luzerne Foundation works to enhance the lives of Luzerne County residents by evaluating and addressing community needs

Children's Services, shared, "We are so appreciative for these funds, which will significantly help with our work to provide children diagnosed with autism the best possible care."

A dinner was held on April 13, 2023, where area nonprofit agencies were recognized and the grants were awarded. Present for the event were **Deanne Chincola**, Service Director; **Meg Lukaszewski**, Vice President/Children's Services; and **Suzanne Pickering**, IDEA director (pictured respectively, first row, left to right).

through strategic grantmaking, promoting responsible philanthropy, and connecting donors to causes that matter to them.

Meg Lukaszewski, Vice President/

Safety Committee 2022-2023 Certification Approved

We are pleased to announce the Department of Labor and Industry has approved Step By Step's **Workplace Safety Committee Certification** for 2022-2023.

This is the 28th consecutive year that the Department of Labor and Industry has approved Step by Step, Inc's Safety Committee Certification with multiple audits of verification. These certifications have earned the Agency a savings of more than two and a half million dollars.

This certification is awarded to companies who have established safety com-



mittees that meet state requirements. Basic requirements include, but are not limited to, meeting monthly, site inspections, accident/injury investigation, maintaining a quorum of members at each meeting, completing required training, and filing certification applications in a timely manner.

Director of Property/ Risk Management, **Tony Astaneh**, stated: "Congratulations on another successful year for Step by Step's Safety Committee. I would like to take this oppor-

tunity to thank each of you and the management staff, along with all the Regional Safety Committee and Centralized Safety Committee members for their commitment to the safety of both consumers and staff. Your efforts have prevented injuries and helped save the lives of consumers, staff and the public. Additionally, this certification entitles Step by Step to a 5% reduction in insurance premium which amounts to approx. more than \$100,000.00, not to mention the tremendous direct and indirect cost savings as well. Once again, thank you for an outstanding job!"

No Fun Allowed in Western Region...APRIL FOOLS!



Left Photo: **Lamont N.** has fun with the photo props. Second Photo, left to right: **Jacob R., Marlene C., Kenya B., Chuck W., and Ralph "Pedie" B.**

Hamburgers! Hotdogs! Side Dishes! OH MY! **Step By Step's Western Region's April Fools' Follies Dance/Cookout** was an absolute delight! As a thunderstorm grumbled through Western Pennsylvania, **DJ Gissy** lit up the dance floor with interactive beats, such as *The Cupid Shuffle*, along with a variety of slow dances, for all to en-

joy.

As the individuals arrived in their mismatched, inside out, April Fools' outfits, they were met at the door with a festive photo-op, then escorted to the dance floor where, boy, did they party! Staff, families, and individuals happily gathered, and midway through the evening, enjoyed a cook-

out. Special thanks to all the community residential and ICF homes for providing side dishes to complement the hamburgers and hotdogs. The contributions of each resulted in a successful, tasty meal shared and enjoyed by all. Following the meal, a King and Queen of April Fools were crowned. The group joined

the King and Queen out on the dance floor and danced the night away! The smiles and enthusiasm shared by all were worth every moment.

Josh Hammack, Service Director, shared: "I would like to thank all who were involved in helping put this event together and to all of the volunteers that made it run as smooth as it did! The events committee, **Chelsea Allen, Eric Cromwell, Danielle Clements, and Lavonne Robinson**, did a great job! And thank you to all of the staff that helped set up and/or clean up after the event!"

Vice President ID/A Services Western PA, **Denise Cavanaugh**, added: "We look forward to the upcoming events that are eagerly being planned in the Western Region, in hopes of creating more invaluable memories together!"

Tenant Service Coordination Program Launched

Step By Step's Southeast Mental Health Division is excited to share news about a new program for the region called **Tenant Service Coordination**. The program assists individuals with significant behavior health challenges to successfully obtain and maintain permanent support housing within Philadelphia County.

A safe and secure place to live is an important part of recovery. The service supports individuals through the

life cycle in assuring that permanent housing is maintained and that any housing-related issue is addressed in a timely manner in an effort to support and have them live as independently as possible.

The program was able to work to move the



first individual into permanent housing in April. **Prinze Whyee** (pictured), Tenant Services Coordinator, states, "I am pleased to see the smile on the faces of the individuals we have helped to obtain housing and look forward to supporting other participants."

Accessibility and Step By Step

Step By Step, Inc. remains committed to ensuring that our homes, facilities, individuals, communications, and technological capabilities meet functional accessibility needs by supporting the day-to-day requirements within the services and supports provided. As a part of these efforts, Step By Step continues to implement an “accessibility plan” that discusses accessibility efforts and establishes goals for the agency to enhance its accessibility throughout the entire organization.

Typically thought of as promoting accommodations for handicapped individuals or advancing renovations/repairs to assist individuals in needs at our homes and facilities, dedication to accessibility efforts include elements that consider environmental or physical accommodations; staff considerations; promoting efforts around terminology within communication and literature; financial considerations; communication barriers; transportation accommodations; access to technology and much more.

As such, Step By Step initiates opportunities to promote accessibility enhancements through the organizational accessibility plan, which is for-

mally revised every 2 years. For the 2022 Plan cycle, the agency considered the following goal areas to enhance our accessibility capabilities: **A.** Step By Step increased the number of homes that are “livable” (having the ability to accommodate a wheelchair) as compared to the 2020 information by 3.3%. 45 of 127 homes are considered livable. **B.** Step By Step increased the number of homes that are “visitable” (having the ability to accommodate a wheelchair for a visit at a home, but not a long-term stay) as compared to 2020 by 2.9%. 50 of 127 homes are considered visitable. **C.** Step By Step increased the homes that accommodate a wheelchair and maintain an installed interconnected smoke and heat system or sprinkler system by 1 additional home since 2020. 38 of 45 homes currently have those capabilities. **D.** Step By Step has maintained the number of homes having 2 means of egress for 34 for homes accommodating a wheelchair. **E.** All of Step By Step homes and facilities have internet access. 141 of 141 locations.

Step By Step and the Executive Leadership will once again be preparing for the 2024 Accessibility Plan to help

promote accommodations and remove barriers. Likely goal areas will include: continued focus on the health and safety of individuals living and working in our homes and facilities; enhancing accessibility accommodations in our homes and facilities; directing new home purchases to identify homes that currently can accommodate wheelchairs or can easily be adapted to accommodate wheelchairs; scrutinizing language in policies and procedures, as well as other organizational literature and communications, that may not necessarily reflect proper terminology; promote training and educational opportunities for ADA or Federal Fair Housing requirements; and enhancing technology capabilities.

The Executive Team and Board of Directors encourages staff, family, and individuals to share thoughts of accessibility needs as means to assist our teams in providing creative and practical solutions to overcoming identified barriers in our homes, offices, and facilities.

Once finalized, the **2024 Accessibility Plan** will be shared with all Stakeholders.

Inclusive Art Show



Roxanne C. (left) and Lauren J. proudly display their artwork.

Lauren J. and Roxanne C. from Step By Step’s Northeast In Home and Community Support (IHCS), were proud to participate in an inclusive art show held at the Luzerne County Courthouse in Wilkes-Barre in March.

“Creativity at the Courthouse” was held in honor of Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and celebrated the unique talents and abilities of individuals with developmental disabilities. The event was sponsored by Luzerne and Wyoming Counties Mental Health & Development Services (MHDS).

Both Lauren J. and Roxanne C. are accomplished artists and sold artwork at this and other area shows. Jody (Georgann) Thompson, Program Supervisor, reports: “Lauren plans to participate in three juried art shows this year. She hopes to sell more of her work and is also taking consignments. Roxanne is working on pen and ink drawing and is displaying some of her works in area offices in the hope of making more sales. Both women are thrilled that they are able to use their talents to enhance their incomes.”

Spotlight on Property & Risk Management: Spring Has Sprung!

With the warmth and longer days of spring, it can be easy to forget about the importance of being proactive with our safety. However, spring is one of the most vital times of year for safety because we're recovering from the cold winter and preparing for the hot summer.



break or fall with little notice when it becomes windy or rainy. If you observe any weakened or dead trees, contact the Property and Risk Department to have the trees maintained or removed.

Keep a close eye on weather reports, too. If there are thunderstorms in the forecast, plan an inside activity for the day. Spring showers can turn dangerous quickly. If you are outside and you hear thunder or see lightning, get indoors immediately and stay inside until the storm has completely passed. While inside during a lightning storm, do not use anything connected to an electrical outlet.

Our vehicles endure a wide variety of conditions in the winter months and preparing them for driving in the spring is an important step to take. Some key points to check when inspecting your vehicle for winter wear include tires, windshield wipers, headlights, and taillights. Tires should be filled to the manufacturer's recommended tire pressure to ensure that your vehicle is handling safely. Properly inflated tires can save on fuel consumption as well. While having your vehicle serviced, be sure to have your vehicle's air conditioning unit and coolant checked and maintained as necessary.

Spring weather does not end with rain and thunderstorms- wildfires are another safety concern in the spring. Being proactive is the most important step you can take when it comes to safety during wildfire season. Piles of leaves, pine needles, and other organic material can be extremely dangerous and flammable. Arrangements should be made to remove or clear away this debris from structures.

While we may have left snow and sleet behind, that does not mean that we should stop preparing for unforeseen weather events. Being aware of your surroundings and environment is vital to keeping yourself and others safe. Going outside and looking around your house and yard is a great start to spring safety. Old, large trees can

Outside of the home is not the only place to be proactive with fire safety. Being sure that smoke alarms are in every bedroom, common area, and on every level of your home or site is an essential first step. However, monthly testing of smoke alarms is imperative to making sure those alarms are working

properly during an emergency. Smoke alarm batteries should be changed at least once a year. Everyone at your site should be aware of the emergency action plan. This not only includes staff and consumers, but visitors to your site as well. Be sure to point out emergency exits and evacuation routes.

In your preparation efforts for the warm weather, don't forget to schedule servicing for your air conditioning units. Proper maintenance of your air conditioners will help keep you healthy, comfortable, and safe. It's important for filters to be replaced to keep air quality at a healthy level and to ensure that you are breathing in clean air. Regular servicing by a professional will help to extend the air conditioner's lifespan and assure that the unit is running as efficiently as possible.

It's easy to forget about how important our safety is when we're focused on getting outside in the warmer weather. However, this is a great time of year to prepare ourselves and our environments for a safe spring and summer!

The above information comes from various external organizations with expertise related to this subject. This information is meant to provide guidance to you and is not meant to replace Agency policy and procedure and/or any regulations under which the programs or Agency must operate.

Earth Day 2023

A big thank you to Step By Step's IHCS consumers and staff who cleaned up the parking lot at Step By Step's Northeast and Administrative offices in Wilkes-Barre in support of Earth Day 2023.



Earth Day was founded in 1970 as a day of education regarding environmental issues. Your actions, no matter how big or small, can drive change and make our planet clean-

er and safer. Why not make every day Earth Day while reflecting on the beautiful world around you?

Photo #1, l. to r.: **Lauren J.** and **Kelly**

Mercadante, Direct Support Staff. Photo #2, l. to r.: **Barbara B.** and **Colleen Kustrin**, Program Director. Photo #3: **John W.**

Step By Step Celebrates “Hockey is For Everyone”

Step By Step recently joined forces with Special Olympics Pennsylvania as a sponsor during the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins “Hockey is For Everyone” game. With Step By Step’s sponsorship donation, Special Olympics Pennsylvania–Northeast Region athletes were able to be showcased at no cost.

The game took place on February 11, at the Mohegan Sun Arena at Casey Plaza in Wilkes-Barre. Prior to the event, Pennsylvania State Police participated in a “Freezin’ for a Reason” dunk tank challenge. All proceeds were donated to the Special Olympics Pennsylvania-Northeast Region. At



Sarah W. holds the Flame of Hope with PSP rep. and Special Olympics members.

the beginning of the game, Sarah W. (an individual who receives services at Step By Step) was invited to walk on the ice alongside Special Olympic athletes. It was a very exciting day for Sarah and many other Step By Step

consumers and staff who also attended the special game.

Hockey is For Everyone was created by the NHL to celebrate diversity among fans and players. The NHL’s Diversity Task Force created the *Hockey is For Everyone* campaign to help support non-profit hockey organizations that provide opportunities to underrepresented, underprivileged, and disadvantaged youth. To learn more about the Hockey is For Every-



L. to r.: Heather Schreiner, Special Olympics PA Regional Executive Director; Sarah W., SBS consumer; Mary Beth Kondrad, SBS Program Manager, and Jillian Schintz, SBS Direct Support Staff.

one campaign, visit: www.nhl.com/community/hockey-is-for-everyone.

The mission of Special Olympics Pennsylvania is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-style sports for all children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving

them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of skills and friendship with their families, Special Olympics athletes and the community. Special Olympics Pennsylvania is evolving and creating more unified experiences so those without intellectual/developmental opportunities may also join. To learn more about the Special Olympics visit: www.specialolympicspa.org.

2022 Quality Management Summary

Step By Step is pleased to share the 22nd Annual Quality Initiatives progress summary. The initiatives included in the 2022 Quality Management Plan are a combination of CARF accreditation initiatives, ODP related goals, and organizational goals identified by Executive and Administrative staff.

Throughout the course of 2022, Step By Step included 18 individual goal areas as a part of the overall organizational Quality Management Plan. Although not included in this summary, the agency also maintained a separate Children’s Behavioral Health Quality Management Plan. Information related to the progress on this plan can be obtained by contacting the Children’s Behavioral Health Director or by contacting the Quality &

Compliance Department. Information on this plan can also be viewed within the “supplemental section” of the 2022 Quality Management Report.

The following quality elements **achieved** their goals in 2022: Staff Vacancy, Restraint Reduction, IDD Individuals Free from Restraint, Timely Incident Finalization, Stakeholder Satisfaction, Utilization vs. Authorization in 4 of 5 monitored areas, Volume of Service Growth, OLTL Comm. Integration, OLTL Activity Completion, Employment Discovery, and Staff Paycheck Direct Deposits.

The following quality elements did **not achieve** their goals for 2022: Staff Turnover, Staff Retention, Signed Individual Rights, Medication Error Reduction, Electronic Vendor Payments,

IDD Individuals Free from Med Error, IDD Individuals Free from Detrimental Incidents.

Despite the understanding that 7 of the plan areas missed achieving their identified goals, several areas continued to make positive progress relative to prior performance.

Beginning in 2023 and cycling for a 3-year period, Step By Step will be submitting a revised Quality Management Plan to ODP which will include goal modifications, goal eliminations and 1 or 2 new goals areas. This new plan is expected to take effect on July 1.

The full Quality Management Report can be viewed by contacting the Executive Team or Quality & Compliance Department.

Karen Zomerfeld, Editor. For more information on contents in this newsletter, please contact info@stepbystepusa.com. Special thanks to the following employees for newsletter contributions: Patti Blazaskie, Meg Lukaszewski, Tony Astaneh, Caitlin Jones, Denise Cavanaugh, Jeff Sherwood, Bob Blazaskie, Jody (Georgann) Thompson, and Phillip Fritchey.

Workplace Communication: Part 1 of a Compliance Department Series

During an average workday, communication flows throughout a company, between all job titles and outward to other organizations and stakeholders. These communications can range from the mere informational to negotiations of great consequence. If a company is like a complex machine, then excellent communication provides oil to its cogs, keeping it running efficiently. And miscommunication made at one level of the company can create reverberations felt throughout the entire company. Because of this, it is worthwhile to consider how we communicate, addressing our areas of weakness and making use of our strengths.

Think about how you communicate throughout the day and ask yourself if any of the following factors/scenarios, adapted from **Lori Katz Ph.D.'s** "5 Essential Strategies for Effective Communication" (2020; Psychology Today), can be useful to you.

Choosing the best time to communicate: Before sending an email or mak-

ing a phone call, consider how the recipient may be feeling at that moment. Do you know of a reason they may be distracted? Do you have knowledge that they have been overwhelmed by a particular issue and may not be in the best listening mood? Since a communication attempted with someone who is unwilling to listen is a wasted communication, you may choose to delay your message, if it isn't urgent, until the recipient is in a more receptive mood. If you are unable to gauge the receptiveness of your audience, you should choose language that is respectful and positive. There are times when company protocol dictates an immediate report. At other times, delaying a communication may result in a missed business opportunity or revenue loss. Before communicating, these variables need to be considered.

Keeping your emotions in check: Before you communicate, ask yourself what mood you are in. If you are upset about a situation, the best time to communi-

cate will be when you are calm. The methods of achieving that calm state are up to the person, but communications should not be made in anger.

If the emotions have been caused by someone else's communication, pause and reread the email or listen to the voice message again. Ask yourself if you have misunderstood the message. Because emails and texts are not enhanced by nonverbal cues - additional communications we make through vocal tone, facial expressions, and body language - it is not uncommon to misread the intentions of the sender. If you receive a communication that triggers you, you may not be able to process the entirety of the message, missing important details. In moments like these, it is best to communicate when your temper is checked. When you do respond, it should be with a calm tone and carefully chosen words.

To be continued in the next newsletter, Philip Fritchey, Quality and Compliance Associate.




Celebrating over 40 years of excellence

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We're on the web at
www.stepbystepusa.com

Step By Step Foundation

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By making a contribution to the Step By Step Foundation

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serve those in need are plentiful. And, they can be important components of tax planning.

Call us at (570) 270-7909 or visit www.stepbystepusa.com to learn more about charitable giving through the Step By Step Foundation.

(The Step By Step Foundation is registered with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations.)