



# Dawnings

**AURORA**

News for the AURORA of CNY Community

OF CENTRAL NEW YORK INC.

**Issue 56, Spring 2023**

## Trust and Communication are the Greatest Barriers...

AURORA's Health Home Care Management serves people who get their health benefits through Medicaid and who are also struggling with a chronic health or mental health condition. Many are unable to find providers and services, which makes it hard for people to get well and stay healthy. The goal is to make sure individuals get the care and services they need while reducing emergency room visits and time spent in hospitals, getting regular care and services from doctors and providers, finding a safe place to live, and finding a way to get to medical appointments.



A 'Health Home' is not a place; it is a group of health care and service providers working together to make sure you get the care and services you need to stay healthy. Along with the person served, the Care Manager is the driving force behind this collaboration.

Indeed, Lakeisha Rhyant and Lindsay Ryan, AURORA's Care Managers, are a force to be reckoned with! Together they serve a total of 49 people, many of whom are deaf and experiencing significant issues in their lives due to lack of access or appropriate means of communication and other stressors that occur due to chronic illness. Lakeisha relates that many of her clients have experienced significant past trauma and remain mistrustful of the systems and providers that are supposed to help.

Lindsay relates that for deaf individuals in our community, lack of access to appropriate communication and the provision of professional sign language interpreting services throughout the healthcare experience can significantly impact the quality of life and health.

The Care Manager serves many roles: cheerleader, confidant, connector, and advocate. The best outcomes are when someone gains the skills, confidence and means to navigate independently through the healthcare system; when doors of access remain open; and the right supports and providers are in place to address chronic health challenges.

*(continued on page 2)*

Both Lakeisha and Lindsay have seen these results; some are slow and steady and some can be life changing. One woman with a chronic mental health condition entered the care management program very mistrustful and timid. She had experienced tremendous changes and loss in her life that only continued with a termination of her therapy relationship as soon as she enrolled in our program. As a result, she was unable to access her medication. Still committed to her recovery, she stated the need to learn how to use Call-A-Bus and obtain an emotional support dog.



So far, this woman has reached both of these goals and is gaining confidence to set some more. She has learned that she can achieve and accomplish whatever she is willing to work for and this has enabled her not only to trust herself more, but others as well.

Another story highlights the impact of what consistent advocacy can do. A gentleman who is deaf was in and out of jail for many years and found himself homeless due to an unfortunate circumstance. He was removed from a program after being labeled “non-compliant” when in reality, he could not hear the instructions being given, as no sign language interpreter was provided. His many physical and mental health needs were also not being addressed, as he was living in a tent.

AURORA’s Care Manager worked diligently to put supports in place and establish appropriate communication with each provider: doctor for medication, lawyer to address the legal issues, housing services to get him a place to live. The result is this: the man spent Christmas in his own room in a house he shares with others. This is the first time in his adult life that he has had a place to call home.



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### Spotlight On: Outreach

Our regular visits to the Booker T. Washington Center Seniors Group always bring a smile and a strong sense of community. The members gather around the table for a game of po-ke-no and some good conversation. They are always appreciative when our Outreach Team, David DeFrancis and Adam Castleman, visit with equipment to assist with low



vision and hearing loss. The practical devices are a huge help and made possible by funding from the City of Auburn Community Development Block Grant and the United Way of Cayuga County. We enjoyed conversing with Pauline Copes-Johnson, the great grandniece and oldest living relative of Harriet Tubman! She shared family stories and wisdom passed down from her great aunt, who was so instrumental in changing our nation for the better. The best advice she ever received was, “Keep on going. No matter how bad it gets we have the choice to make things better.”



## Spotlight On: Roger Purdy; Director of Disability Support Services at Le Moyne & STRIVE Program Director

AURORA has collaborated with Le Moyne College since 2013 to deliver the STRIVE (Stepping Toward Real-life Independence and Vocational Excellence) Pre-College Program for youth with vision loss sponsored by the New York State Commission for the Blind. For the last nine summers, juniors and seniors from across the state have lived in residence for six weeks on the Le Moyne College campus, learning the ropes and expectations of college life. Students attend classes, participate in social activities and learn new skills that will help them succeed.



Since the program's inception, the Le Moyne team has been led by Roger Purdy, the Director of Disability Support Services. His leadership and support of this program has made it a success year after year. Roger holds a Master's in Education Administration, Planning and Social Policy from Harvard and has held his position at Le Moyne since 2003. Before that he held a similar position at Onondaga Community College.

For over three decades, Roger has been supporting students with special needs navigate the transition from high school to college. He strives to find the "right fit" for secondary education with the correct combination of support services and accommodations to help each student succeed. He noted that while there has been an increase in technology that is available for learning, some students with disabilities are still excluded by barriers of complexity and lack of accessibility.

Roger champions the STRIVE Pre-College Program because it provides students with earlier exposure to educational options to help them discern their direction. He notes that the college drop-out rate for students with disabilities remains high (over 60%) but that attending a pre-college experience can reduce that rate. Students with visual impairments, in particular, need to learn independent and safe navigation, how to self-advocate for special accommodation and gain confidence in social and recreational activities.

Roger relates the story of a young man who came through the program who had vision loss and an indication that he was also struggling with hearing loss. That was never properly addressed. Roger worked hard to obtain an appropriate assessment and to accommodate both of his sensory losses. He arranged for all instruction to be captioned in real time for the student, something he had never experienced before in all of his years of schooling. To see the relief and absolute joy on the student's face to be able to understand what was going on in the classroom was one of the highlights of the program for Roger and for us all.

Year after year, students have commented on the life-changing value of their experience at Le Moyne College. We are grateful to Roger Purdy for his partnership in making that happen!



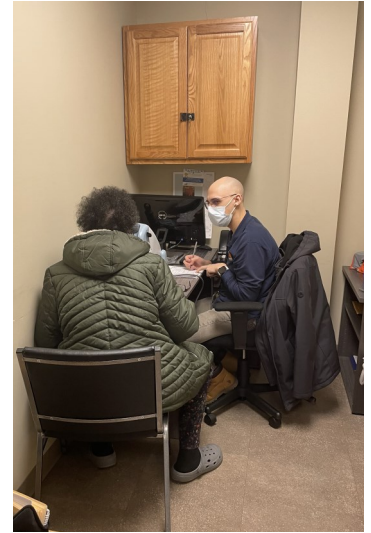


## Spotlight On: Partnerships

For the past two years AURORA has collaborated with the Emmaus Ministry in Syracuse to provide free routine vision and hearing screenings on a monthly basis. This partnership has yielded many wonderful results. One woman, who experienced hearing loss due to past childhood physical trauma, had spent most of her adult life believing that she could not hear. During the screening, she received a free pocket talker that proved otherwise. She immediately brightened up with wonder as she put on the headphones. When she went out to the parking lot, she stood in amazement as she listened to the birds sing for the first time in a long time. This is just one of the many stories we could tell.

On a recent visit, Sheila Austin, the Director of Emmaus Ministry remarked, "The presence of AURORA has brought hope, light and sound to our guests." We look forward to many more opportunities to do that.

Emmaus Ministry is an outreach ministry serving the poor, hungry, isolated and homeless of the south side of the city of Syracuse. They serve between 120-150 meals per day, along with providing dental and medical services. To learn more, go to [www.emmausministry.org](http://www.emmausministry.org)



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## We Want Your Donations!

No longer using your aids and devices? AURORA takes donations of the following gently used items to be recycled for others to use:

- Hearing aids (digital and analog)
- Eyeglasses (prescription and non-prescription). We do not need the cases.
- Magnifiers, assistive devices, or CCTV's

Please bring your donations to our offices at 1065 James Street during the hours of 8:30am to 4:30pm Monday through Friday. We appreciate your assistance!





## Spotlight On: New Board Members

We are pleased that **Kate Weidman** has joined our Board of Directors. Kate is the Director of Compliance and Training for a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) that provides medical dental, behavioral health and social services to underserved individuals and areas, regardless of financial, cultural or social barriers.

We knew Kate previously in her role with Central New York Care Collaborative and the DSRIP program which was dedicated to improving quality of care and services throughout Central New York.

Currently a member of the Fundraising Committee, Kate joined the board because she has witnessed first hand how AURORA's services have made a difference in people's lives. She is passionate about ensuring access to services for people with vision and hearing loss, particularly for children, youth and young adults. According to Kate, "Access is the gateway to opportunities."

Kate resides in Syracuse with her husband, two children (5-year-old boy and 2-year-old girl), and her wonderful 'pup', Nyx. They love to be out and about playing sports, visiting local restaurants/breweries [Anything with animals gets an A+ in their books!] and being outside.



We also welcome **Sarah Steinmann** to our Board of Directors. She is currently an attorney with a history of working with a range of healthcare organizations. Prior to her career in law, she was a higher education administrator and an EMT. Sarah is particularly interested in education and advocacy work that engages community leaders to join AURORA's efforts to eliminate barriers that impede individuals with vision or hearing loss from participating fully in society.

Serving as a member of our Fundraising and Development Committee, Sarah cites that she has been both uplifted by our mission and inspired by her parents Dr.'s Richard and Kathleen Steinmann, who have been long time supporters of AURORA and recent Honorary Chairs of our Musical Feast for the Eyes and Ears event. We are grateful for this multi-generational commitment to our organization and look forward to working with Sarah as she "carries the torch" of her family's dedication to improving the lives of people with vision and hearing loss in our community.

A special thank you to all of our generous sponsors, donors, and friends who attended our 2022 Musical Feast for the Eyes and Ears. We are so grateful for your ongoing support!

# MUSICAL FEAST FOR THE EYES & EARS

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**Thank you to the following members and donors** who are committed to the continuation of AURORA's vital services for those with vision and/or hearing loss. Names listed are those who have contributed from January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022. We apologize for any name that may have been omitted from our list.

*Thank you!!*

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