


THE CIRCLE

 FriendshipCircle

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BORING

without **AMI**



ETP SPOTLIGHT
SAVANNA HELTEMES

LIFE NAVIGATORS
A GPS FOR FAMILIES

**ONE THING I
WISH YOU KNEW**

4 TEENS SHARE THEIR
MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY

AZURA MEMORY CARE
& ASSISTED LIVING

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A LETTER *from the* EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Dear Friends,

We are so pleased to publish the fifth issue of The Circle magazine! We hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we enjoy sharing stories and information with you.

In this issue, you will get to know the Kramer family along with learning about the importance of Life Navigators and Azura's impact on the community.

Did you know that 82% of adults with disabilities are unemployed? The Friendship Circle offers Employment Training to bridge the vocational gap and prepare this population to join the workforce. For more information, visit

www.fcwi.org/job. If you know of a business that may be interested in hiring an Employment Training graduate for equal-opportunity employment, please go to www.fcwi.org/PIE to learn and care for this amazing community! We are so grateful!

As always, we welcome your feedback and suggestions as this magazine is for anyone who has a disability or anyone who knows someone with a disability. In other words, EVERYONE!

Sincerely,

Levi & Leah Stein

& The Friendship Circle Family



The CIRCLE TEAM

Authors

Brittany Lewis

Katie Lindgren

Joan Elovitz Kazan

Designed by

Mushka Scheinfeld

Produced by

The Friendship Circle
of Wisconsin

ETP

BY BRITTANY LEWIS

Spotlight

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

Savanna Heltemes

It's 12:00 p.m. on a Monday at the Wisconsin Athletic Club. As customers check in for their workouts, Savanna Heltemes is clocking in for work on her phone – a skill she has learned and mastered since starting the job eight months ago.

“I love it,” she says about the work she gets to do, “Vacuum, wipe mirrors, mopping, and folding towels.”

On this particular day, her shift starts with vacuuming. As she walks through the gym, customers greet her. She waves and smiles back. She plugs in her vacuum, winds the long cord in her hand, and makes her journey to the corners and crevices of the gym floor, picking up any crumb or piece of dirt left behind.

Savanna, 25, has Down Syndrome. Her journey to get this job started at The Friendship Circle of Wisconsin through the Employment Training Program (ETP). She graduated from the program in February 2022.

“She was the first one to participate in the program,” said Savanna’s mom, Nancy Heltemes.

“Most come in and think they can’t do anything because they are different, so it’s nice for us to spend time with them to build their confidence and show them they can do it,” said Chrissie Pappas, Employment Training Manager at The Friendship Circle of Wisconsin.



“No matter where the student is, we can do an assessment to make sure they are still going to grow”



SAVANNA SMILING PROUDLY AT WORK IN THE WISCONSIN ATHLETIC CLUB.

The Employment Training Program consists of four classes, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, with each class level focused on the trainee's abilities.

The morning classes have activities like folding towels, doing dishes, learning how to measure the nutrients, harvesting lettuce, making chocolate covered pretzels, and more.

The afternoon classes are held in the bakery and are more intensive. Students learn how to follow simple recipes and eventually work on more complex ones. These students are able to add working in a professional kitchen to their resume.

“No matter where the student is, we can do an assessment to make sure they are still going to grow, but aren't going to fail or feel overwhelmed,” said Pappas.

The year-long program focuses on individualized training. There is a 1:2 student to teacher ratio.

“It's really important and it's really unique. Most training programs are big, big groups and the trainees don't get that individualized training. We're watching everything they do and we can really see all those little things that usually get missed,” said Pappas.

Upon graduation, the trainees apply for jobs with one of the 50 companies The Friendship Circle partners with. Trainees have found jobs at places like The Wisconsin Athletic Club, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Betty Brinn Children's Museum, and the Milwaukee Bucks. When a trainee gets hired, Pappas says it feels like her job has come full circle.

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SAVANNA AND CHRISSIE SHARING HER DIPLOMA AT THE ETP GRADUATION.

“The trainees come in, they really don’t have that self esteem, they don’t think they can function without a ton of help and nine times out of ten, they can. For them to have a job, I know they feel so proud and they feel like a real part of the community,” said Pappas.

Back at the Wisconsin Athletic Club, Savanna is listening as her job coach shares her work tasks for the day. It’s a job that makes her proud. When asked if her job makes her feel good, she says, “Yes.” Her favorite parts: being around people and checking in the customers at the front desk.

She uses her paycheck to pay rent, buy groceries, clothes, and magazines. As a person who likes routines, the four-day a week schedule with three hour shifts helps her find balance with all the other tasks she likes to do.

When she’s not working at The Wisconsin Athletic Club, Savanna is learning to be a good self advocate through the Partners in Policy Making, an advocacy training program from the Wisconsin



SAVANNA WON A PEER AWARD AT THE WISCONSIN ATHLETIC CLUB’S ANNUAL EMPLOYEE AWARDS EVENT.



Board for People with Developmental Disabilities.

Savanna is also on the member advisory committee for My Choice Wisconsin, a big supporter of job training programs, helping others get to a place where she is.

Savanna spends her free time participating in Special Olympics Bowling, listening to music, and watching WWE on Monday nights with her fiancé, Henry, who is now participating in the Employment Training Program at The Friendship Circle.

ETP is a program that Savanna's mom, Nancy, says is vital. "Our young people with intellectual disabilities have something to contribute. They can be contributing members and citizens. They want to work and they help other people in the workforce be better as well. I'm just really thrilled we found that program and that it worked out that we could do it for Savanna."



SAVANNA SHOWING OFF A DELICIOUS CREATION.



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SMILES FROM THE MEMBERS OF LIFE NAVIGATORS.

LIFE NAVIGATORS:

A GPS for Families

By Joan Elovitz Kazan



When a loved one is diagnosed with a disability, it can feel like the beginning of a journey with no direction. Accessing resources can be overwhelming, but no one has to take the journey alone. As its name implies, Life Navigators is there to guide families along the path.

Mary Till, Associate Director of Life Navigators, shared the organization's mission, "to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families."

Serving the Greater Milwaukee community for almost 75 years, Life Navigators has helped thousands of families through in-home programs and services and by connecting them to other agencies and resources.

"Life Navigators has been around since 1949 and our target population is individuals with developmental and related disabilities," Till says. Individuals and families can take advantage of these services throughout their entire lives. "We work with individuals and families from a new baby with a diagnosis, all the way through different issues they face during school," Till says. Life Navigators' support doesn't end at graduation. "We help with the transition to adulthood, all the way up to helping frail elders with issues of aging," Till explains.

"Most people come to us through our information and assistance program... either they're looking for a specific type of service or maybe they don't know what they're looking for, they just know

they have a need," Till says. "We can provide them with our resources or we point them in the direction of other agencies or governmental benefits," Till explained.

The Life Navigators Family Support and Futures Planning Program helps connect families to community resources and programs. "This is about making sure that individuals are connected to key services that will help them reach the goal of being able to live involved lives in the community. We also help make sure that there's a plan in place for the future," Till says.

Every family needs to consider who will take care of their children once they are no longer able to themselves. For families of a loved one with a disability, that consideration doesn't go away.

As children grow beyond school age, futures planning becomes vitally important. "Especially with our older families, we help them make sure that they have a plan in place for where their loved one is going to live. Who will be the key people in their lives? Do they have all the tools in place that they need?" Till adds.



Life Navigators' Corporate Guardianship Program can alleviate some of the stress and anxiety that comes with the question: "who will take care of my child?" Till explains. "We were one of the first corporate guardianship agencies in the state of Wisconsin and our agency actually serves as legal guardians for adults with disabilities.

We know what's important to them and what's in their best interest

Thanks to Life Navigators, no one is alone. "For people who don't have anybody in their life to serve as guardian, or if someone comes to us through an adult protective services group and is in need of an agency to look out for them, we can be that agency," Till says. "As Corporate Guardian, Life Navigators helps the person make health and safety decisions, they make sure that they have access to their benefits and they help them find different services to enhance their lives," Till explains.

Life Navigators' highly trained, experienced professionals form close relationships with their clients through ongoing interactions including

regular home visits. "We have guardianship representatives who are assigned to specific individuals. So they'll have one key person as their main connection for services and for support personnel to contact if there are issues or emergencies," Till adds. "We get to know them well so that we can be good advocates for them. We know what's important to them and what's in their best interest...we also make sure that their service providers know who we are and that we're involved," Till says.

Families who need expert advice about asset management and maintaining eligibility for benefits can count on Life Navigators' Trust Program. "When an individual is reliant on public benefits such as Medicaid or supplemental security income, there are income and asset limits. No one can have more than \$2,000 of all of their assets combined at any given time, or they will lose connection to those benefits," Till explains. "That Medicaid piece is so important because it gives them access to long-term care services which can pay for things like a place to live, a place to work and extra activities," she adds. "A special needs trust is a way that an individual can actually have extra assets above and beyond that \$2,000."

A Life Navigators' Trust makes a big difference in a person's life. Meet Cameron. Cameron loves swimming, dancing and shopping.

Cameron and his dad, Charles enjoy walking along the lakefront, cheering on their favorite sports teams and visiting theme parks.

Charles turned to Life Navigators to create a Pooled Trust for Cameron. This protects Cameron's public benefits while allowing him to pursue his favorite activities. Cameron was even able to visit family in Georgia thanks to his Life Navigators Trust. "We are so grateful for Life Navigators' services for Cameron," Charles said.

Socialization and community involvement are important components of healthy living and they're particularly significant for people with disabilities and elderly populations. Life Navigators offers programs and events through their Self-Advocacy and Independence Program. "We have activities such as game nights, a fitness group, a men's group and a women's group. Every month it's a little bit

different. We have an email that goes out to let people know what's in store for the next month," Till explains.

There's a boost of self esteem that comes from giving back and helping others in the community and Life Navigators makes that happen, too. "Individuals with disabilities can give back by volunteering for another organization," Till says. A group from Life Navigators donated their time to the Hunger Task Force last fall. "Some of our staff and some of our consumers harvested corn at a farm for an afternoon," Till says.

Join the list of families with disabilities who have benefitted from Life Navigators programs and services. To talk with a Life Navigators team member about your family's needs, visit their website at LifeNavigators.org or call their helpline at 414-774-6255.



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Wish you knew is a relatable podcast that will bring insight to what you, or someone in your life, may be experiencing. So whether you're a teen, parent, or teacher, listen in to their stories to hear what they wish you knew about their journey.

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All content is reviewed by a panel of mental health experts. Our podcast is crafted with care to ensure a supportive and informed space for your mental well-being.



OTIWYK: Vulnerability Was The Vibe

Last November Friendship Circle and REDgen invited invited four teens to share their mental health journeys at the annual U Matter One Thing I Wish You Knew event. Jenna, Madison, Emma and Lily understood the assignment. These brave young women shared their stories to an audience of 400 gathered at the Jewish Community Center. Attendees enjoyed a spread of Friendship Bakery treats before listening to these inspiring teens open their hearts with the goal of opening minds.





TEEN SPEAKER JENNA GIVING AN INFORMATIVE SPEECH ABOUT HER JOURNEY WITH PANDAS.

Jenna

Before I begin, I would like to say how insanely grateful I am to have been presented with this kind of an opportunity - to come up here and share my story with you all today. I am going to be honest... writing this speech was a lot harder than I had originally anticipated. I'm always willing to share my story, but it has taken me a long time to get to this point in my life.

When I was 10 years old, I was diagnosed with something called PANDAS Syndrome. It's not something that a lot of people know about. PANDAS stands for Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections. That was a lot of really big words in a row, and quite frankly I didn't know how to pronounce some of those words until a few weeks ago when I was writing this speech.

PANDAS Syndrome affects 1 in 200 kids, and oftentimes it will go undiagnosed. Everyone has a different experience and journey with this. Some of the symptoms that people who are diagnosed with this experience are anxiety and depression, OCD, changes in motor or learning skills, changes in mood especially rage

or irritability, difficulty sleeping, and the list goes on and on. Strep throat also plays a big role in this disorder.

I remember consistently going to the doctors office to get tested for strep throat. I went in so often that they knew me as soon as they saw me. There was one nurse who would always stop in and say hi even if she wasn't treating me, and she'd always have a strep throat test in her pocket if she was treating me, so we could get it out of the way. It was that bad. The strep throat I would get was so severe to the point where amoxicillin didn't work and we had to use a stronger medication called cefdinir.

As if dealing with strep throat isn't enough, I was dealing with a good amount of those side effects I listed off. I think that the one that affected me the most was OCD. I personally hate it when people who like to have their desk organized say that they have OCD, because that isn't even half of what OCD is. I mean if you saw my room right now, you'd agree with me there. I personally have struggled a lot with germs. I was absolutely terrified of them. I would always carry hand sanitizer everywhere with me to the point where my hands would crack cause they were so inflamed and dry. I would have clorox wipes in my desk at school so that if someone touched me or something of mine I could clean it off ASAP. If I wasn't

able to clean myself off of whatever I felt made me dirty, I wouldn't be able to get rid of the feeling. It's like when you go swimming for a super long time and then once you get out, you still feel like you're swimming. It was one of my greatest anxieties.

OCD wasn't the only big thing that I've struggled with. I had a lot of anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. I would get panic attacks often. If you've never had one, it's probably one of the scariest things to experience. Because of all of this, my performance in school dropped and I was falling behind. I was still getting good grades but I didn't understand a lot of what I was learning and it's still something that I find myself struggling with to this day. It's a horrible feeling.

All throughout this I would constantly ask "why me?" Why did I have to be put through this? What did I do to deserve this? Why, me?. It was always a thought in my mind and I often wondered whether or not I would be able to get through it.

I've finally figured out what the answer to my question of "why me?" is. It's the reason that I'm standing here today. To share my story and to educate people on what PANDAS syndrome is.

I'd like to say thank you. Thank you to my doctors and family who were right there through the worst of it all. Thank you to my friends who were there to make me smile and laugh. Thank you to my REDgen family who have helped me come to accept me and my mental health. And most importantly, thank you to younger me for staying strong and fighting. So, one thing I wish you knew is that there's always an answer to "why me?".



MATT CREATING A PUSHUP CHALLENGE WITH WILLING VOLUNTEERS.



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Madison

Today I'm here to share my mental health journey with you in hopes that someone is able to connect with my story and truly believe that you should not feel scared to share your story. Mental health should not be something to be ashamed of.

In July of 2015, my life changed forever. I was eight years old at the time. I was spending the weekend with my grandparents while my parents were visiting my sister at college. During one of these nights, I woke up to a loud boom. Being the nosy person I am, I walked over to my grandma who was crouched down under the window talking to someone on the phone. I looked out the window and saw a man on the street with a gun and another man lying on the street. My grandma immediately pulled me down and told me to be quiet and go lay back in bed. Let me tell you ...it's not easy sleeping when there are sirens going off right outside the window. When my grandma got the clear, we were able to go outside. When we did, I saw a man that was just shot lying there and the other man in the back of the cop car. Because of all this, for about two years I wouldn't sleep alone.

In the beginning, it started with me sleeping with my mom every night, and as it progressed I would start off in my room staying awake until I thought my mom was asleep, and ending up sleeping on her floor. I didn't care where I ended up as long as I wasn't

alone. To this day, this incident impacts my sleeping habits. You bet that every time I hear a noise at night I either text, call, or walk into my mom's room because I feel like there is someone outside. Consequently, this event ruined sleepovers for me because I didn't feel safe anywhere besides in my own home with my mom. Still, I sometimes text my mom asking her to pick me up.

I started seeing a therapist when I was around nine years old to help manage my emotions. Soon after, my therapist moved away. I found a new therapist and also met with a psychologist who diagnosed me with an anxiety disorder, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



Last year on October 20th, my school got a phone call notifying them that there was an intruder in our building. On the intercom I heard, “math level”. I was on the math level. Being in shock and my teacher still thinking it was a drill, I along with the rest of my class ran behind my teacher's desk and just huddled together, all texting our loved ones about what was going on. Most of the people I was crouched down next to were crying. I couldn't breathe. All I wanted was space. I was hot and all my mind was doing was flashing back to that night. I felt numb.

Once the police escorted us to one of our safe spaces, I just let it all go. I couldn't hold it in anymore. I was balling. My friends had to help guide me down the stairs. Everyone around me was asking me if I was okay and if something had happened. I then explained that this event was triggering my PTSD. Luckily the therapist I saw was at the school at the time everything was happening and saw me, and was able to help me calm down.

People often stigmatize seeking help, and label you as “weak” for doing so. It should be the opposite. People find it challenging to seek extra help. If you can admit these things... you are strong.



Lily

One thing I wish you knew is how I grew through my mental health struggles to become the person I am today. My story begins the summer before my freshman year of high school in 2020. We had been in quarantine for the last 3 months of my 8th grade year. During this time, I experienced severe depression and began having body image issues. I spent every day in quarantine dieting and exercising excessively. However, I never felt like I was doing enough and continued to push myself to lose even more weight. Because my only social interaction was through social media, I gained unrealistic ideals of what a female should look like during a crucial time in my mental and physical development. I started to place all of my value on how I looked. Because of this, I developed social anxiety and when I began high school, it was very difficult for me to interact with others without comparing myself to them. All my life I had been a social butterfly and was able to make friends easily. So, the isolation I experienced during this time severely damaged my self esteem.

In the first few months of freshman year, I had lost an extreme amount of weight and was very sick. However, I did not believe that what I was doing was wrong because the perception I had of eating disorders was not entirely what I



ONE THING I WISH YOU KNEW EMCEE JACKIE VALESQUES, FORMER IN-GAME HOST OF THE MILWAUKEE BUCKS, PICTURED CENTER.

experienced. My struggles felt invalidated because I had never fainted or went a day without eating which was my marker for a “real” eating disorder. My only experience with eating disorders up to that point in my life had been through TV and movies which as we all know is mostly unrealistic. In January of 2021, I was admitted to a behavioral health hospital for anorexia and major depressive disorder for 3 months. I was placed in the Child/Adolescent Eating Disorder Ward where I met teens from across the country with a range of different backgrounds and mental illnesses. There, I realized that mental health struggles, especially eating disorders, look different in everyone. I finally accepted that what I was doing was unhealthy and that I was hurting myself mentally and physically by trying to achieve the unrealistic standards I had set for myself. What I hadn't accepted yet was that others would believe my story. I thought that because I no longer looked sick and had gained back the weight I had lost, that I would be judged for saying I really struggled with anorexia. It took me months of therapy and sharing my story with people that understand the struggles of mental illness to learn that my mental health is not a defining feature of me as an individual and is instead something I have to work with and on.

My REDgen group has taught me how to help myself and others who struggle with mental health issues. My peers in REDgen were some of the first to learn about my time in hospitalization and were and continue to be very supportive of me. Groups like REDgen and Friendship Circle are working to destigmatize mental health struggles so that teens like myself will feel validated in their battles and will receive tools to strengthen their mental health. I left the hospital two and half years ago not knowing if I would be able to grow through my struggles. And now, here I am sharing my story with a room full of people who are working so hard to help kids and teens like myself who have mental health issues. I am so incredibly inspired by everything we have achieved and can't wait to continue helping others by pursuing a career in mental health services. Thanks to my time in therapy and my experience as a part of REDgen, I know that my purpose in life is to help guide teens through their own mental illnesses as an adolescent psychologist. If I had told myself all of this three years ago when I was at the height of my illness, I would have never believed that I made it to the other side. I'm so proud of everything I've achieved and am excited to see what's next in my journey. Thank you.

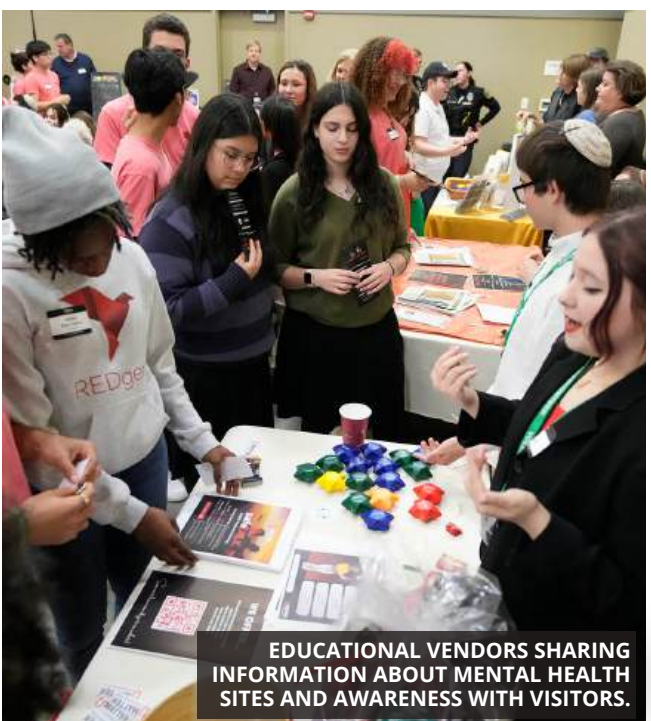


OVER 400 TEENS AND ADULTS LISTEN TO TEEN VOICES ADVOCATING FOR MENTAL HEALTH.

THE CIRCLE MAGAZINE ISSUE 5 19



FORMER MILWAUKEE BUCKS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY COORDINATOR BROOKS GRIFFIN SPEAKING ABOUT HIS PERSONAL STORY WITH HIS MENTAL HEALTH AND HOW IT'S "OKAY NOT TO BE OKAY."



EDUCATIONAL VENDORS SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH SITES AND AWARENESS WITH VISITORS.



TEEN SPEAKER

EMMA

Emma, a senior in high school is excitedly preparing for her next chapter in life - college. She is interested in pursuing a degree in psychology, with the ultimate goal of becoming a psychiatrist and making a positive impact in the mental health realm. Throughout Emma's high school career she has been involved in a multitude of activities including Coding, U-Matter, and French Club. She enjoys exploring new activities, spending time outdoors, and being with her family. Her personal experiences with mental health have motivated her to help those around her, with her hope of paving a path for the next generation.

TEEN SPEAKER EMMA SHARING HER STORY ABOUT HER STRUGGLE WITH DEPRESSION AND THE RESILIENCE THAT FOLLOWED.

Emma

One thing I wish you knew can be a hard statement. This is especially true if you are anything like me. As indecisive as I am, deciding on one specific thing, most of the time, seems impossible. So ordinarily, when I was given the task to not only pick something I wanted other people to know but to also write a speech about it, I initially felt super excited and honored. Though, after the initial excitement set in, I was extremely overwhelmed and anxious. And as time continued on I questioned if what I had to say was even worth hearing. My mind did that thing where it runs a million miles per second and starts to examine every aspect and detail of life thus far. Due to the anxiety that I was getting from this task, along with school stress, and completing college applications, I began to re-enter a stage I'm quite familiar with - a depressive episode.

Now being someone who has been dealing with anxiety and depression since around 5th or 6th grade, I've become what people may say as the depression episode master.

To clarify, I am able to recognize when a depressive episode is coming, though getting through that time is a different story. This is something that I still struggle with while realizing I'm not in a good place and actively trying to get better. You see, when I get really depressed, all I want to do is sit in bed and sleep. I don't want to socialize with anyone, and I don't want to leave my room. I just want to be alone. But that is one of my biggest problems. When I am very depressed, I usually feel alone but I tend to isolate myself, making myself feel even more alone. I'm not sure why I push people away, but it's something I've always done. I am working on it and I've learned to not be ashamed of myself for it. Not being ashamed of myself has been a huge step for me. And, not being ashamed of what I've been through too.

Toward the end of 8th grade, during Covid quarantine, I entered one of my worst depressive episodes. I hated not being able to see my friends and the future just seemed so uncertain. My anxiety and the discomfort I experienced became too overwhelming, and so I attempted. After being medically cleared, I was taken to a psychiatric hospital. If you know anything about the admissions process into a psychiatric hospital, it takes a hot minute. So, picture this with me - I'm 14 years old, sitting in the waiting room thinking a number of things, but mostly "How can I get myself out of here?" I had no idea what it was going to be like and quite frankly I was terrified.

Fast forward about three years and I am in my first semester of junior year of high school. My sister left for college and I was in an extremely unhealthy relationship. That same feeling came back. And almost exactly a year ago I was admitted back to the hospital. Now this time when I was sitting in the waiting room I was thinking “I can’t believe I’m here again” because for a really long time I thought I would never go back. I never thought I’d be able to admit I was struggling that much again.

Everyone’s experiences are different. But surprisingly, considering the circumstances and minus the food, I had a positive experience at the hospital both times. I think what made it manageable was the other kids. Group was the most influential part of my time at the hospital. It was a time when I was able to hear what other people were going through. Knowing that I wasn’t alone in how I was feeling comforted me. It made me feel like I wasn’t “crazy” or that there wasn’t something wrong with me. We all were at some of the lowest points in our life, but being able to collectively struggle together made it seem possible. The second time I went will always be a core memory for me. I was the oldest kid there and it felt like

a duty for me to look out for the others. I could see so much of myself in them. How I used to be and how I used to act, how I used to think, reflected so much in them. So the night before I was supposed to be discharged I wrote them all notes about how great they were and to remember that it will get better. When I was leaving, they all gave me hugs and told me goodbye. I felt sad because I hadn’t felt more connected to a group of people before. They made me feel understood and I didn’t want to lose that. But, I had made a promise to myself that I would stay better for them. And so, I got back on my meds regularly and started working on myself.

Now, I know you’re thinking, “well Emma what is the one thing you wish we knew... you’ve told us about twenty different things!” First, thank you for noticing! But, what I really want you to take away from my story is that - you are not alone. Even when it feels like you are alone, and that no one cares or understands, or wants to help... there is always someone who does. And even if there is really no one at all, eventually there will be and eventually it will get better. Life is not a straight line and you will have to go through difficult situations that will test you in every way. You will experience what feels like impossible emotions. It is the inevitable, the inescapable. So I’ll leave you with this: you are not alone. You will get through this, and it will get better. Maybe not right now... but someday.



A HUG SHARED BETWEEN LEVI AND MILWAUKEE SUPERVISOR SHELDON WASSERMAN AFTER RECEIVING A PROCLAMATION FROM THE COUNTY BOARD FOR THE EVENT.



SABER Group Homes

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WE CURRENTLY OWN AND OPERATE 4 OTHER GROUP HOMES IN SOUTH MILWAUKEE, BAYSIDE, THIENSVILLE AND GLENDALE.

BAYSIDE 8820 N Rexleigh, Bayside, WI **GLENDALE** 2145 W Hemlock Rd, Glendale, WI
SOUTH MILWAUKEE 812 Marquette Ave, South Milwaukee, WI **THIENSVILLE** 213 W Alta Loma Circle, Thiensville, WI

ROBERT LEE KNOLL

Chief Operations Officer



SARA IZGELOV

Chief Executive Officer

Robert is a retired member of the U.S. Air Force. He is currently employed as a U.S. Army civilian. He dedicated his life and career to serving our country and will be assuming the role of Chief Operations Officer at Saber Group Homes. Rob has spent many years building successful teams in the Air Force and most recently the United States Military Entrance Processing Command (USMEPCOM). Rob brings many years of dedication, structure, hard work, and unwavering service and mission accomplishment. He will continue his full-time employment with USMEPCOM but will devote most of his free time to Saber Group Homes operations.

Sara has 12 years of experience working with long term care programs (My Choice Family Care, iCare and IRIS). She started as a case manager and moved up to become Supervisor, Program Manager, and State Liaison. She worked at Rogers hospital helping teenagers and individuals with addictions overcome life's challenges. She is a licensed psychotherapist, specializing in high risk teenagers, developmental delays, severe persistent mental illness, family counseling and addictions. Her passion lies with vulnerable populations.

Saber Group Homes has been in operations since 12/1/2020. We have operated 4 group homes, serving vulnerable, high needs population. Our pioneer group homes are located at Bayside, Glendale and Thiensville. We pride ourselves in providing quality of care to all residents, while supporting their families. Saber Group Homes is in the process of opening our 5th location at 7861 S68th street, Franklin. We are hoping to start operations in Franklin within the next six months.

Our Goals and Mission for Saber Group Homes: Our primary goal is to keep residents safe, happy and satisfied in a homelike environment. **Our mission** is to provide quality, individualized care in a home-like environment and deliver compassionate care, health, nutrition, and safety in a minimally restrictive environment while promoting residents' independence. We are strong believers that positive and productive communication is key to everyone's success. We are happy and proud to serve Bayside community.

GET IN TOUCH

SARA 414-514-8207

ROB 414-690-9434

Sabergrouphomes@gmail.com



**LIFE
WOULD
BE PRETTY
BORING**
without **AMI**

By Katie Lindgren



Life would be pretty boring without Ami.” I quickly discovered how true this statement is during my time with the Kramer Family. Ami Kramer is 42 years old and was born in Northbrook, Illinois. She is medically fragile and has developmental disabilities, but none of which keep her from being the life of the party in the Kramer Family. She is Holli’s daughter and Randi’s younger sister. All three of the Kramer ladies were quick to point out that all their names end with an “i,” making them even more special and unique. Even Suki, their beloved dog, shares this with them as well.

When Ami was younger, she loved and thrived being in a school that was a first of its kind. Ami was in a pilot program and was in a self-contained classroom in a general education building. Ami and her family soon discovered that she flourished with her neurotypical peers.

Ami and Holli moved to Wisconsin over 13 years ago. The two settled in Ozaukee County after seeing how accessible the adult services were for Ami after

connecting with the local Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). This was an immediate draw for Holli as she explained how difficult it was to navigate the world of adult services from their time in Illinois.

she immediately got the biggest smile and said, “Friendship Circle is the best!”

Every decision that Holli makes is with Ami in mind, including the purchase of their house. Finding the right house meant looking for a place that Ami would be able to navigate through. This would also grant improvements to be made that would allow for more accessibility and independence. Their bathroom has since been remodeled to move the toilet closer to the door and add a walk-in tub for Ami. Doing this has

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Classes are offered three times a week for 5 hours, with lunch provided each session. Each day consists of a structured curriculum with a variety of topics. We will incorporate brain games, exercise, and social stimulation. Studies have proven that people who engage in complex tasks (exercising your brain) can significantly lower the risk of Dementia including improving the cognitive function of the brain. The Mayo Clinic study done in 2009 reported that people who engaged in mentally challenging activities in their 50's and 60's were 40% less likely to suffer memory problems.

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created more independence for Ami and has made things easier for her family members to help her in and out of the tub. During Ami and Holli's first two years in Wisconsin, Randi would commute from Illinois every weekend to spend time with her family. After traveling many miles, Randi finally decided it was her time to also make the move to Wisconsin. Since then, the Kramer's have been busy doing life together. They are season ticket holders to the Brewers. They enjoy every chance they get to attend the games together.

Ami also loves music (as long as it isn't opera, she wanted to make that clear) - her love of music stems from it helping her learn to talk so many years ago. She loves being outside, sleeping, being with her friends, hanging with her sister, being a troublemaker, and doing anything she can with Friendship Circle.

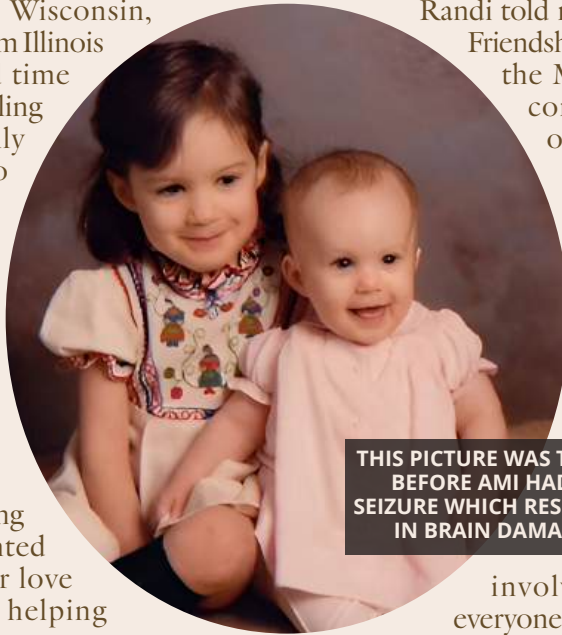
“They're there for you and whatever you would like to get out of it.”

I asked Ami if she could tell me just one thing about Friendship Circle, and she immediately got the biggest smile and said, “Friendship Circle is the best!” Ami couldn't pick her favorite Friendship Circle activity since there are so many! She has enjoyed everything from the adult game nights over the summer, bowling, mall walking, art night, music nights, to classes with Upstream Arts or Glaze Pottery, and Pink Umbrella Theater.

A tour of Ami's room showed how true it was that these were her favorite things! Her shelves and walls were carefully decorated with all the

items she had made at Friendship Circle events, pictures, and memories of the friendships that had been formed because of them. Holli and

Randi told me stories of how amazing Friendship Circle is. Holli mentioned the Mom Support Group and community that comes out of being a part of Friendship Circle. Holli told me that one of the best parts is that at Friendship Circle, they don't care what you can or can't do—“They're there for you and whatever you would like to get out of it.” Holli and Randi



THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BEFORE AMI HAD A SEIZURE WHICH RESULTED IN BRAIN DAMAGE

told me about the impact they see that Friendship Circle has on all individuals

involved. They told me that everyone gets something out of their time there: the participants, the staff, the families, the volunteers—everyone!

From looking around Ami's room and their home, it was easy to see how much Friendship Circle has impacted the Kramer Family. As our conversation went on, the more Ami's “troublemaker” spirit began to shine through. We connected over our shared favorite foods, eggplant, and chocolate ice cream! She was quick to give her sister Randi a hard time about anything - even if it was in the middle of our conversations.

Ami told me I was being a troublemaker as our conversation continued. I learned we both enjoy spending as much time outside as we can and making people laugh. I asked Holli and Randi how Ami's journey impacted or shaped their own. Randi told me how her childhood was filled with roller skating in the hospital basements while Ami was upstairs. She did her best to hide from the security guards to skate as long as possible. Randi told me how much she appreciated that her parents never kept anything from her while Ami was in the hospital. They let her be involved in the conversations and discussions with the doctors and medical staff.

Randi later grew up to become a special education teacher, and she explained she



SMILES ALL AROUND AT ALL STAR GYM.



AMI EXERCISING AT THE MEQUON ALL STAR GYM WITH VOLUNTEER KELLY.



AMI BEING ASSISTED TO BREAK A BOARD BY FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE VOLUNTEER AIDEN AT MEGAN GURTON'S TAU QUON DOU EVENT.

couldn't help but think that was because of Ami. A few years ago, Randi left her life behind in Illinois to join her family here. Randi told me, "You do what you got to do." Ami has helped shape the way Randi looks at everything. "Is it accessible? Is it Ami proof?"

The journey in parenting Ami helped Holli grow in many ways. She talked about how there was so much to learn, so much to navigate and balance while caring for two young children. They all agreed that this journey has been a roller coaster ride.

The Kramer Family gave me a glimpse into their lives and story. Ami showed me what it's like to be a goofy goober and cause some good fun. The Kramers embrace their quirkiness, and anytime someone might call them weird, they thank them proudly. Being outside of the "norm" is celebrated in the Kramer household.

In our lives, we should all learn to embrace the roller coaster ride of our journey. We should make up our own song lyrics to sing to our friends, go to all of the Brewer Games that we can, call everyone a goofy goober, cause some trouble, and embrace the mischief that lives in all of us.

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Azura Memory Care & Assisted Living

BY BRITTANY LEWIS



When a loved one is in need of memory care, it can be challenging and overwhelming to find the right place for them to go.

“I love just being able to support families and support residents that really need it,” said Jill Kreider, president of Azura Memory Care and Assisted Living.

Azura Memory Care and Assisted living has 14 locations around the state of Wisconsin. The Wisconsin-based and family-owned company serves the aging population, focusing on people with early to late stages of dementia and

memory loss with suites that are designated for the residents.

Kreider says one big differentiator for their locations is what they call their household model.

“We found that the best environment for them is to create something that looks and feels like home, so all of our communities we’ve designed to feel that way. The communities are set up with a living room, a small dining room. There’s nothing big and grand, but it just looks and feels like a home.”



What is Friendship Circle?

FRIENDSHIP CAFE & BAKERY

We are **open to all** to enjoy as we create jobs & employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. We're Kosher, nut-free & most bakery items are dairy free with gluten-friendly options.

SOCIAL & LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS

Friendship circle hosts programs for kids, teens & adults with varying abilities. These programs give a sense of community and belonging to all who participate!



Friendship Circle
of Wisconsin in division of Laborators of WI

We are not your **ordinary** shop
We're kinda **Extra Ordinary**



FRIENDSHIP ART STUDIO

Friendship circle hosts art programs & classes for people of all abilities breaking down barriers and stigmas. We also have birthday parties for all ages.



Friendship circle focuses on mental health awareness for all Parents, teen & grief support groups & suicide prevention trainings.

EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

Friendship circle trains & employs individuals with disabilities to be a contributing member of society.



It's also important for residents to feel like those caring for them understand what they are going through while experiencing memory care. Azura Memory Care and Assisted Living caregivers can gain an understanding through a unique program called mosaic training. It is a dementia specific training that puts people through a virtual dementia tour.

"You put on goggles, you put on headphones, you put things in your shoes, gloves, and you're given certain tasks, and it helps people just have more empathy and understand what someone with dementia may be going through so that they can better care for them," said Kreider.

All of the caregivers go through the 10 minute simulation within their first 30 days on the job.

Family members and people in the community can take the training, too.

"It's really helpful for those with dementia," said Kreider. "We're always looking for ways on how to support people outside of our walls."

One way the team at Azura Memory Care and Assisted Living does that is by holding a memory care class for those in the community who are not living at one of their facilities.

The class is three days a week from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and is available at their Fox Point, North Shore, and Brookfield locations. It's geared toward those who want to keep their brain sharp and healthy. The class is taught by an instructor who provides games, puzzles, word puzzles, math, and reading. The class is usually for people who are in early stage memory loss or people who



have dementia that runs in their family and want to get ahead of it.

“It’s been a nice program for the caregiver, too,” said Kreider. “Oftentimes the spouse or the child that’s taking care of them at home is able to drop them off for the program and then take care of life activities.”

For Kreider, the work they do inside and outside their walls is all about the people they care for and the people who are doing the caregiving.

“I love being involved in an organization that is making a difference in people’s lives, truly caring for our residents, and their family members in a holistic way, as well as supporting the community.”



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Thank you Levi and Leah Stein
for all your efforts with The Friendship Circle.



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