



Gainesville Opportunity Center

# GAZETTE

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## County Partnership Strengthens

Alachua County is doing something we hope a lot of others will do: they are reserving jobs specifically for GOC Members as they work themselves back into the community.

You are probably aware that the GOC helps adults living with chronic mental illness get back out into the community, find jobs, and keep jobs. Mental illness is a leading cause of work related disability in the United

States. Many of our Members have not worked in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years or ever. Terrica (pictured above wearing an orange shirt) had never worked before coming to the GOC.

For people who have had difficulties working and maintaining jobs, a little support goes a long way. Please turn to page 4 to read about our special services that help our Members return to the workforce. **(Continued on p. 2)**

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**M** *By: David Stevens*

Meet Karen Lovely! Karen started coming to the GOC because she was looking for a place to get volunteer hours with peers for her CRPS (Certified Recovery Peer Specialist) certification. Peer Specialists are paid to work with people with mental illness. In order to qualify for this position, you must have lived experience with serious mental illness. The positions are highly effective because as a peer, individuals often feel a sense of connection.

Karen found out about the GOC through the Center for Independent Living. She did on-the-job training for three months at the GOC. After that, she completed 500 volunteer hours, becoming a certified CRPS, and then a GOC Member.

The GOC has helped Karen in her recovery by giving her a place to socialize, and supporting her current goal of maintaining paid volunteering with NAMI Gainesville by leading Peer to Peer classes. Karen wants to eventually work full-time as a Peer Specialist. She is also a caretaker of her identical twin sister, who is a person that lives with blindness and cerebral palsy.

Karen said that, "I have made friends here. I feel like my opinion matters because as a Member I am part of the decision making."

She also helps out with daily tasks in the Office unit. She helps out in the Media Unit by taking videos and photographs, and participating in graphic design. She helps out in the garden with weeding, watering, and planting. Karen also



enjoys socializing at GOC lunches and participates in Social Saturdays and other social events.

These tasks have helped support her goals and break her isolation. Karen's physical health also benefits at the GOC through her volunteering with the Special Olympics.

Karen is involved in NAMI Gainesville through leading the Peer to Peer class and by attending the Connection support group. She also recently represented NAMI Gainesville at a statewide NAMI conference. For Karen, it is important to advocate to break stigma. NAMI is an organization that participates in advocating for policy change.

# KAREN LOVELY



Life isn't all about work, and neither is the GOC. Being part of a team, making friends, and feeling like you belong are important benefits of organizations like the GOC.

For Karen, the GOC is a place that offers a unique atmosphere that you just cannot get anywhere else. It is a place where Karen feels like she belongs. She gives back as well, using her skills as a peer and putting them to use with her fellow GOC Members.

The GOC has given Karen a place to socialize, and gives her purpose. The GOC needs Karen too. Her commitments to the Newsletter, meetings, and everything else are invaluable.



Karen Lovely is putting her degree in graphics design to good use. She helped to redesign and continues to contribute to the newsletter.



Karen recently traveled to Orlando with NAMI Gainesville for their annual conference. Karen helps others while she helps herself.

# ALACHUA COUNTY JOBS

**O**ne of the greatest accomplishments of the Clubhouse is getting people back to work. Employment is a gateway to independence. It is so important. Mental illness is one of the leading causes of work related disability in the United States. Many of the people we help at the GOC have not worked in 5, years, 10 years, 20 years or longer. There are adult Members who we have placed in their first jobs in their entire lives.

Partnering with key businesses is essential to our ability to do this. The employer has to be willing to provide a supportive environment where our Members can succeed.

We are extremely proud to officially partner with Alachua County for Transitional Employment (TE.)

Alachua County is sending the message that every person is an important part of our community.

Gina Peebles, Chief of Staff in the Alachua County Manager's Office agrees. "We are excited to partner with the GOC to help people get back into the workforce. These jobs are helping people take important steps in their lives."

TE jobs are designed to be time-limited. Each GOC Member will typically stay in the position for six months. Then we work to get our Member a more permanent supported job and put someone with greater need in the TE.



Transitional Employment is a critical component of the Clubhouse Model, which is a holistic and evidence-based approach to supporting individuals with mental illness on their journey to recovery and community reintegration. This model, developed by Fountain House in New York City in the 1940s, focuses on the principle that meaningful work and social relationships are fundamental to a person's sense of purpose and well-being. Transitional Employment is one of the key strategies employed within the Clubhouse Model to help individuals with mental illness reintegrate into the workforce.

One of the distinguishing features of Transitional Employment is the support system provided by Clubhouse staff and peers. Clubhouse members,

# ALACHUA COUNTY JOBS



Jonesha Churn works in the Alachua County Manager's office. She delivers mail between the State Attorney, Tax Collector and other important government offices. She receives support from caring county leaders and the GOC.

often referred to as “colleagues,” work alongside one another in various roles, fostering a sense of belonging, collaboration, and mutual support. The goal is to build self-esteem, improve job skills, and gradually transition individuals into mainstream employment while reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. Through this approach, individuals can gain confidence, work experience, and references that increase their employability in the competitive job market.

“Every citizen in Alachua County matters,” Gina says. We are thankful Alachua County feels that way. If your business feels that way too and wants to help get people back into the workforce, please contact the GOC.



Our employment partnership with Alachua County began around the start of the COVID Outbreak. This is Sean at the County Headquarters making sure everything is sanitary and clean.

# ***PARTNER: STEPS TO WELLNESS***



In a heartwarming display of community support, the GOC took part in the Steps to Wellness luncheon hosted by Meridian. This event plays a crucial role in advancing Meridian's mission to foster the overall well-being of individuals grappling with mental illness.

As a community partner, the GOC serves as a beacon of hope and empowerment for our Members. Offering mental health clubhouse services, the GOC has been a steadfast ally to those seeking to regain control over their lives. The collaboration between our community partners is a testament to the power of partnership and community support in the realm of mental health and wellness.

Meridian refers Members to the GOC. While Meridian provides essential treatment and support, they recognize that the journey toward mental wellness is complex. It's here that the GOC steps in, allowing Members to actively participate in running our daily operations.

This involvement empowers GOC Members and provides them with a sense of accomplishment that fuels self-confidence. This becomes a catalyst for positive change in other facets of their lives, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being.

GOC Member Marie, who takes pictures for our newsletter, orchestrated this photo with Sheriff Emory Gainey and his command staff. Deputy Dan Maynard of the co-responder team introduced Marie to the GOC. Since then, Marie's hospitalizations are down and she is thinking about returning to work. When community partners work together, we can change lives.



# GATORS: SUPPORT GOC



Did you know Alberta can donate pretax money right out of her paycheck to the GOC? Well, maybe not Alberta the mascot, but the UF employee wearing the suit sure can. We attended the UF Campaign for Charities kickoff event where employees can select from an approved list that has been screened carefully by the University. UF has 20,000 employees. Make sure your friends who work there know how the GOC is creating hope and changing lives.

Thank you to GOC Member Marie for representing the GOC at several events this month. Members participate in ALL aspects of helping run the GOC. This includes community awareness and advocacy for those living with mental illness.

See <https://ufcc.ufl.edu/> for details.

From Executive Director Deidra Simon

## *Donor Dollars with Deidra*



Hello! With only two months left in 2023, I am wrapping my mind around how fast time has flown by. However, I am grateful for all the GOC has accomplished together! I want to say thank you! Thank you to our colleagues (GOC Members, employees, volunteers, and board members) for working collectively together to increase our mission of creating an inclusive and supportive community for persons with mental illness. We are mission-strong because of you!

Also, thank you to our donors, who continue to give generously! Your financial support helps us continue our many programs and services to serve our Members better. We are so proud of our Members finding jobs, finding friends, and embracing their journey to recovery!

We encourage you to continue to give towards this vital work, and thank you in advance!

A special note for UF Faculty and staff: The University of Florida Campaign for Charities (UFCC) is a wonderful way to set up recurring gifts for the organization of your choice. We appreciate your consideration to support the GOC! If you have any questions about enrolling, please get in touch with your HR representative.

With gratitude,

Deidra

# GOC & ROTARY CREATE HOPE



Officer Bill Gough of the Meridian Co-responder team explains how their program diverts people from hospitals and jails.



Four clubs and good people made our kitchen happen.



Service Above Self is Rotary's motto. Our program is similar as our Members' productivity gives them confidence and strength. Together, we "Create Hope in The World. "

# MONTH IN PICTURES



We thanked the Rotarians for our new kitchen. Kim and others made and served them lunch.



Akeem is making sure everything is just right for the Rotary's thank you luncheon.



Joevan just keeps getting promoted at work. We are proud of you!



Don't forget. Our Fall festival is Friday Nov 3 from 11a-5pm here at GOC.

# ***GOC GETS RESULTS.***

**For Florida  
clubhouse  
Members that  
attend for at  
least a year:**

**98%**

achieved fewer  
(or no) psychiatric  
hospitalizations

**97%**

report fewer  
interactions with  
law enforcement

**89%**

report improved  
quality of life

***DONATE NOW  
TO HELP PEOPLE  
FIND A COMMUNITY  
LEARN NEW SKILLS  
GAIN CONFIDENCE  
GET BACK TO WORK***

**Point your smartphone's  
camera at this code to  
donate!**

