



Gainesville Opportunity Center

# GAZETTE

January 2024. Volume 6, Issue 1

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Eric Godet, Gainesville Chamber President; GOC Member Reid Schreiber; Bryan Eastman, City Commissioner; J. Nordqvist, Gainesville Rotary Club, at the swearing in for the Gainesville City Commission in January 2023.



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## Moments of Impact 2023

### Real Stories of life changing moments from the GOC

**Susan Thomas, Supported Employment:** "Getting a job with Challenge Workforce Solutions. Without the GOC, I never would have gotten that job. I did not know of any companies that specifically hire people with disabilities."

**Zach Scarton, Office/Media:** "Before

I started coming to the GOC, I was alone in my room all the time with my negative thoughts. Then I started coming to the GOC and noticed that my negative thoughts happened less. I made a goal to start coming to the GOC more, and now I feel less alone. I have more hope."

**Whisper Sibert, Culinary/Janitorial:** "I've enjoyed making friends and having something to do."

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

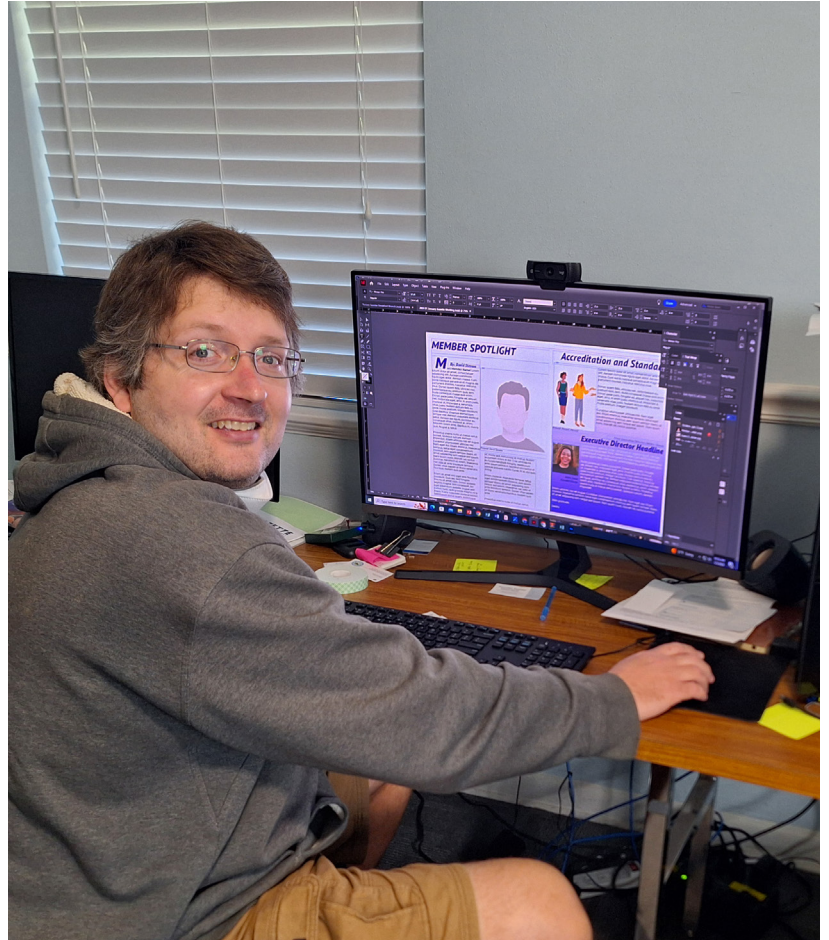
**M** *By: David Stevens*

My name is David Stevens. I have been a GOC Member since 2008, and wow, things have changed! Until recently formal meetings only occurred at the GOC several times a year. Now, we have several meetings a day! There are many more positive changes that have occurred because of increased funding. But the GOC still runs with the same spirit that it did in Mike and Pam Demers' kitchen: with the healing that comes with people just working together as a true team.

I heard about the GOC from my parents who helped found it. Because of stigma, I did not admit to myself that I had a mental illness. I went to a GOC presentation and saw that people living with mental illness are basically just like everyone else. After the presentation, I signed up to be a Member on the spot. I have been an active Member ever since! The GOC has helped with my recovery by giving me a place where people understand and accept me for who I am.

At the GOC, you will find me in the Office and Media units writing for the daily Gazette, and PowerPoint Presentations. In addition, I write for the monthly GOC Gazette remotely from my computer at home. I also attend GOC Zoom meetings. Sometimes I feel a lot of anxiety. I still wear a mask when I am in public. I do not attend as much as I would like to because I am uncomfortable around groups of people indoors. This is partly because of COVID.

Participation gives me the satisfaction of working with other Members and



*David Stevens is a founding Member of the GOC.*

staff. I keep coming back to the GOC because it is truly a sacred place for me. I have accomplished many things at the GOC, including paid work, volunteer work, finding a place to eat lunch with friends. It's a place to go where people understand me.

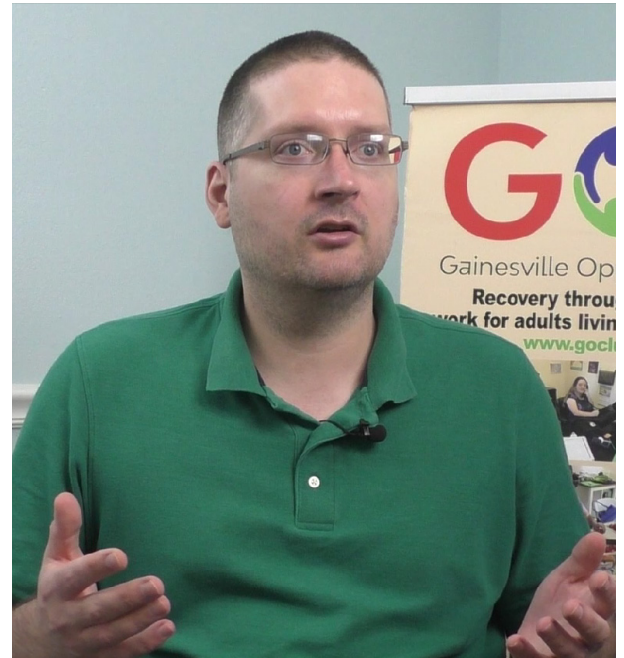
I am also actively involved with the National Alliance on Mental Illness, NAMI. I am a trained facilitator for their Peer-to-Peer education course for individuals living with mental illness.

Without the GOC, my life would be completely different. So much of my life involves the GOC. And that is a great thing!

# David Stevens



*David, his brother Brian, and mom Joan Stevens participate in GOC activities like Bike Day. His participation helps the GOC and himself at the same time.*



David has been involved with the GOC since we were founded. He's speaking here in our Founder's Video made to celebrate our 15-year anniversary.

David's family has been involved with the GOC since our founding. David's father, Bruce Stevens, was our first Board President.

At the GOC, our goal is to help our Members become active participants in our community. For that reason, we often involve the greater community in our activities. It is not uncommon for Members like David to share his GOC experiences with others in his life.

Public events and advocacy are activities where GOC Members and the greater community can come together.

It's all part of helping our Members lead meaningful and productive lives.



David is active with our newsletter, whether it is writing articles or taking photos. His work is appreciated here and he contributes to our community awareness and public image. It is integral to the GOC success.

# Moments of Impact 2023

**Akeem Johnson, Culinary/Janitorial:**

“I was shocked when the [program director] left. She was a good generalist. But, I think that the way things have turned out, the events that we have done, have been good. Not every day this year has been easy but we continue to get better.”

**Brett Buell, Development Director:**

“There were several moments where the community has just really embraced us. Our Fall Festival, the FCC Conference, and visits by local law enforcement stand out to me. I feel that our leaders are starting to realize how important our work is and the impact we make in people’s lives.”

**Jacqueline Dunbar, Culinary/Janitorial:**

“The GOC and Meridian helped me to move into Transitions which is a better fit than my last group home. Now I have 24 hour staff, transportation, and medication management. That helps me to work longer hours here at the GOC.”

**Paul LeBlanc, Wellness/Media:** “When staff and members were invited to celebrate Belinda Solomon’s life. Belinda was the first Member that I connected with at the GOC. Losing her so soon after I got to know her was very hard. Her wry, sometimes dark, humor kept everyone laughing, as she was the first face most of us saw when we walked in the GOC. We will always keep the joy she brought us and continue to feel her absence.”



“Tom” Lane Kelly works reception with Deidra Simon

**Joanna Brouades, Wellness/Office:** “Made a difference in my life by helping me to keep my job.” [The GOC] Helped me to be more responsible member of the community.”

**Alina Harshbarger, Office/Media:** “Gave me something I thought I’d lost: Hope”

**Lasheka Roberts, Culinary/Janitorial/Wellness:** “The GOC helped me to understand what being more independent looks like”

**“[The Gainesville Opportunity Center] gave me something I thought I’d lost: Hope.”**

# Moments of Impact 2023



At the GOC, we all count. Here is Dominic working on our culinary finances to make a bank deposit.

Everyone who walks through the door is greeted with smiles

**David Stevens, Media:** “When the kitchen was being renovated and the GOC worked out of the church - it showed me how resilient everyone is. We were able to keep working even though we were not at our building- that was special to me”

**Sierra Reynolds, Media / Office:** When I got my TE, I had a feeling of accomplishment. I met one of my goals here at the GOC. When I was able to afford getting my hair done, that was an amazing feeling.

**Jonathan Guess, Transportation / Office:** The GOC is a good place to work hard and make friends.



Having friends and fun is a great way to stay out of crisis. The GOC State Championship bocce team can attest to that.

# Never Alone: Holidays at the GOC



*Clubhouse Standard #32: Holidays are celebrated on the actual day they are observed. Therefore, the GOC was open on Christmas day.*

As part of the Clubhouse Model we have standards. One of the standards says that Holidays are celebrated on the actual day they are observed. For that reason, the GOC was open Christmas Day. Many people with mental illness live in isolated situations and do not have access to family, friends, or other groups which allow them to feel part of a

community.

For holidays, the Members are truly part of the celebration. We had a planning meeting, where the Members had a voice in the menu and activities. We went shopping together, and Members helped pick out the food.

Staff and several Members worked together on breakfast. We also had a coffee bar, where we made coffees like Starbucks with whip cream and fancy flavored syrups such as toffee. Members and staff worked together on the breakfast. Staff worked very hard on the breakfast, but the meal can't be made without Member participation. This shows our Members they are truly needed at our celebration and allows them to take responsibility for something greater than themselves.

In our community, we have Members living with chronic mental illness taking on important tasks to organize and orchestrate an event. This event gives Members a sense of empowerment, community, and accomplishment. Members are not only receiving the benefits of the holiday party, they are taking responsibility to make it all happen.

We hope these building blocks will



*Clubhouse Standard #9: "Staff are sufficient to engage the Membership, yet few enough to make carrying out their responsibilities impossible without Member involvement." The outcome of this principle means that we need Members in order to accomplish our goals, and Members genuinely feel needed.*

# Accreditation and Standards



Gainesville Opportunity Center



The Gainesville Opportunity Center (GOC) is a fully accredited Mental Health Clubhouse. 2024 marks the 30th year of the founding of Clubhouse International. This year, we will highlight the 37 standards of Clubhouses in this newsletter. The standards are essentially a bill of rights designed to empower Clubhouse Members.

Adults living with chronic mental illness have traditionally had their choices taken away. There has been prejudice and stigma about what people with mental illness can and cannot do for themselves. Our model is designed to empower our Members to give them a stake in our community and to help them lead the most productive and meaningful lives that they can. The principles underlying our model are the core of who we are. Please turn to page 6 to read about our celebration at the Clubhouse on Christmas Day, and how that celebration works under our standards.

From Executive Director Deidra Simon

## Embracing the New Year at the GOC



Deidra Simon,  
Executive Director

And just like that, 2024 is here! Thank you to our community partners, donors, friends, and family members for making this year a success. In 2023, every part of the GOC, from the building we occupy to the programs and people within, embraced change and growth to increase support and services to Members.

As we embrace this new year, I can not wait to see more inclusion, acceptance, and support for our Members. The only way to accomplish our mission of seeing persons with mental illness as an integral part of society is to do this together. Thank you in advance for working with us to create job opportunities, engage in our social and awareness activities, and provide financial support.

Here's to a prosperous new year!

With gratitude,

Deidra

# 2023 AT THE GOC



Not only did Rotary donate the money for a kitchen renovation, individual Rotarians donated architectural drawings, contract services, flooring and plumbing. They even negotiated lower prices at contractors rates.



Susan and Shakira prepare lunch in our new kitchen.



Caridad Ferriero loves working at reception and answering our phones.



Once a month, after the work day, Members gather at UF HealthStreet for Art for All. Akeem shows off his art!



# 2023 AT THE GOC



GOC Members Karen and Rose Ann while Rose Ann worked as a Peer Specialist. They became close.



Founding Member Mike is hard at work preparing lunch.



Roscoe is the official GOC mascot. He comes to visit with our board member Manny Quiroga.



Member Reid Schreiber is working on our monthly Gazette. He is one of our editors and writes too.

# **GOC GETS RESULTS.**

Gainesville Opportunity Center

**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!**

