



May 2021

MESSAGES

A Publication of MEG's Gift Inc.



GRATEFUL AS WE CONTINUE OUR MISSION

A Message from Kathy and Ray Garbach

Our hearts are filled with gratitude as we give thanks to our generous supporters who continued contributions to MEG's Gift during 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to curtail our fundraising events. Nonetheless, we were still able to benefit Children's Institute with \$20,000 in 2020 (see article on page 2). Overall, since its inception, MEG's Gift has donated over \$300,000 to mental health organizations in keeping with our mission to positively impact mental health care through financial support, education, and advocacy. What a wonderful testament to the generosity of our supporters. Thank you one and all!

Our work now continues, albeit in a scaled-back fashion, as we resume the summer fundraising with our golf tournament at both Shadow Lake courses on July 24th with box lunches and dinners for golfers. Unfortunately, the silent auction and dinner will not take place in order to conform to state-mandated protocol for community gatherings. It is our sincere hope that your generosity will outshine the darkness cast by this pandemic and that the lost revenue from the cancellation of the dinner and silent auction will be lessened. Although the look of the event will change from previous years, it will not be without our usual enthusiasm and hospitality as we move toward normalcy.

Golf sign-up and opportunities for sponsorship giving can be found on our website and donations can be made either through our secure website at www.megsgift.org or via mail at MEG's Gift, Inc., P.O. Box 876, Penfield, NY 14526. We also welcome donations in memory of deceased relatives and friends, or in honor of individuals on special occasions.

The pandemic has taken a toll on the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our lives and those of our loved ones. The stress of these uncertain times has accentuated the need for all of us to take better care of ourselves. Consistent with the mission of MEG's Gift, we ask for your prayers for all who suffer with mental illness, as well as those who struggle with the mental health stresses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It has been seven years since our beautiful daughter, Megan Elizabeth Garbach (MEG), lost her battle with depression. We continue to emulate her loving and giving spirit by carrying it forward in the work of MEG's Gift. This is Megan's legacy.

Please join with us in continuing that legacy. For any assistance you need in golf registration, sponsorship opportunities, or making donations, please contact Kathy or Ray Garbach at info@megsgift.org.

With blessings and warm regards to all,
Kathy & Ray Garbach
CEO & President, MEG's Gift, Inc.

MEG's GIFT 6TH ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT



SATURDAY JULY 24, 2021
SHADOW LAKE GOLF &
RACQUET CLUB

VISIT
WWW.MEGSGIFT.ORG
TO REGISTER AND
LEARN MORE

MEG's GIFT DONATES \$20,000 TO CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE

In a virtual meeting held on December 18, 2020, Kathy and Ray Garbach informed Ann Marie White, Executive Director of Children's Institute, that Children's Institute would be receiving \$20,000 from MEG's Gift. The Garbachs conveyed the message that MEG's Gift is pleased to support the wonderful work of Children's Institute in fostering the social development and emotional wellbeing of children.

Children's Institute partners with community agencies and schools to strengthen the social and emotional health of children by assisting with the implementation of evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs. It provides assessments and trainings to support those who work with children including parents and teachers and also conducts research and evaluation to continuously improve services that enhance the growth and development of children.

One program that MEG's Gift funds will support is Primary Project. It is designed to enhance school-related competencies and reduce social, emotional, and school adjustment difficulties. The program was originally developed and researched over 60 years ago. Since then, the program has undergone refinement and adaptations to meet the changing needs of children and schools.

MEG's Gift selected Children's Institute to be the 2020 beneficiary prior to the pandemic and growing racial tensions. The need for its services within the community grew significantly throughout the year. "We know that social and emotional health of children is greatly impacted by times of anxiety," Ann Marie related.

"There is no doubt that the coming days will bring even more change. Children's Institute is committed to remain flexible as we transform our programs to meet the immediate needs of young children and their families, and work collectively towards an anti-racist future."

In expressing her gratitude for this donation, Ann Marie remarked: "Our experience is (that) MEG's gift is a source of light and grace that instills hope as families and schools face together the increasing challenges brought in the wake of 2020. The support that MEG's Gift provided Children's Institute so generously in this unusual year, keeps strong our efforts that make a difference to children in achieving resilience, adjustment and social and emotional (and thus holistic) wellbeing."

A PRIMARY PROJECT SUCCESS STORY

"I started getting calls from his preschool teacher saying that he was acting out and a real distraction in class. We learned about Primary Project when his first grade teacher recommended him for this program.

children's
institute

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL HEALTH

He really liked the one-on-one setting and the connection with the Child Associate and we saw a change in his behavior almost immediately. His teacher later observed that he was better able to settle down, focus on his work and become friends easier with his classmates. Before second grade, he hated going to school but his attitude changed after Primary Project. He has since graduated from college and is now a successful adult working in the engineering field. We feel that the turning point for him was participating in Primary Project and hope that other students can benefit from this valuable program." Parent of former Primary Project participant

EAST HOUSE NAMED 2021 PRIMARY BENEFICIARY

The MEG's Gift Board has selected East House to be the primary beneficiary of funds raised in 2021. Incorporated in 1966 as a nonprofit agency, it began as a safe and supportive transitional residence for persons leaving psychiatric hospitals who were not yet ready to live on their own. It was the first "halfway" house for persons in recovery from mental illness in New York State. From this one house on Dartmouth Street in Rochester with three employees, East House has grown into a comprehensive rehabilitation agency with 210 employees that provides several levels of supervised and independent housing options along with a comprehensive array of programs and services for over 1500 persons annually in the Greater Rochester area who are recovering from persistent mental illness and/or substance use disorders.

"Recovery is a journey," according to Kim Brumber, President and CEO of East House, "and the journey for our clients is moving their lives forward...toward wellness." The services of East House are provided directly by agency staff or through partnerships with other organizations and address several key areas of clients' wellness. It starts with the clients' environment. Safe, quality, affordable, and stable housing is the foundational element of recovery within the East House service delivery model.

Referral and coordination of health care, medication management, tobacco cessation, and healthy eating and exercise programs are among the services that attend to clients' physical needs. The financial dimension of wellness is the focus of case managers who assist clients to access the government benefits to which they are entitled and teach them how to budget their money.

The intellectual and occupational dimensions are covered within the agency's learning center and educational and employment counseling services. Based on need and

interest, clients can receive remedial education or attend classes preparing them for high school equivalency testing. Vocational counseling is individualized and includes skills assessment, job readiness training, referral to schools and vocational training programs, and help with job placement. East House provides social and recreational activities, one-to-one counseling, and short term respite services with peer mentoring to facilitate socialization and address the emotional health of individuals served. Finally, the agency offers yoga and meditation classes and arranges for pastoral education in an effort to support the spiritual growth of clients.

"We are truly honored to be selected as the 2021 agency beneficiary of MEG's Gift," Kim stated. "Our organizational missions are aligned- empowering people in recovery from mental health and substance use disorders to live healthy lives."



"For 55 years, East House has provided housing and recovery services for people in our community but our world is changing. As public funding for our programs and services remains static or declines, our case for private support continues to increase. This incredible pledge of support from MEG's Gift will continue our mission to move lives forward." Kim Brumber

East House
moving lives forward



SUPERVISOR AND FRIEND: REFLECTIONS ON MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MEGAN

By: Nancy S. Van Dussen, P.E., Environmental Department Manager at Ravi Engineering & Land Surveying

I was honored to be asked by Megan's mom, Kathy, to write this article reflecting on my relationship with Megan from the perspective of having been her supervisor and friend. I was impressed with Megan from the time she first interviewed for the position of Environmental Scientist at Ravi Engineering & Land Surveying. She came to the interview well prepared, presented professionally, and stood out from the other candidates. We agreed she was the one to hire. Over the next 5 years, I couldn't have been happier with that decision, from both a professional and personal standpoint.

Megan was a great employee, always wanting to learn and make an impact in the environmental field. I did not know for quite some time that Megan struggled with depression, as she didn't show any outward signs in the workplace. She was a model employee and was well respected and liked by everyone. Her intelligence and great attitude were what we all saw. As a learning experience, I once took Megan to a project meeting with me and heard that a senior staff member at the other firm was impressed by Megan as someone who was "wise beyond her years." Yes, she certainly was. She was also one of the kindest persons I have known. She loved everyone and always had a kind word toward all. She was truly someone who you have the privilege to meet and connect with only a few times in your life.

Megan was much more than an employee or co-worker. She was also a dear friend. It may seem unlikely, because I was old enough to be her mother, but Megan made friends wherever she went and work was no exception. We spent a spring day volunteering for Habitat for Humanity



painting the porch for a new home. We had so many laughs and she made it so much fun with her positive, can-do attitude and radiant smile.

As time went on and Megan was struggling more, and making medication changes, she did confide in me about her struggles with depression and some of the issues in her personal life. While she much preferred to help others rather than ask for help herself, we did talk often in private about the debilitating effects of depression and what she was experiencing. She explained her struggle to sometimes focus on work. Her productivity and attendance did suffer a bit. As her supervisor, I felt it was very important to help her in any way I could. I had seen firsthand close family members struggling with depression and knew they needed flexibility during difficult times to cope with changes in daily life situations and medication. I saw that she was trying so hard to get the depression under control through counseling and medication.

I always viewed it as her being in a "trough" at down times versus being "at the top of the wave" when things were better. I always just assumed Megan would get out of the trough and get back on top of the wave as she tried to find solutions. She was so intelligent, communicated so well and had a wonderful support network from family and many friends. As much as I saw her struggle at the end, I never thought she would lose her battle with depression and end her life. I guess we just don't

have the knowledge of, or experience with, suicide to understand the real threat depression is to so many wonderful people.

There were a few challenges at work, mostly dealing with co-workers who simply did not understand why she couldn't just "snap out of it," or "get herself together" and be reliable for work assignments. I felt extremely fortunate to be able to manage my employees within a very kind, flexible work environment where the happiness and wellbeing of our employees is important to the company owner, Ravi. I did not give him details of Megan's situation due to the confidentiality of employee health information. I told him that she was struggling with health problems and would sometimes work less hours as she dealt with her issues. He didn't press me for details, saying only that we would do whatever was needed to help her at this difficult time and allowing me to deal with the situation as I saw fit. I felt relieved because a previous employer I had took the exact opposite approach to this type of situation, resulting in people losing their jobs if they couldn't show up for all work assignments each day.

I did have some push-back from a couple of employees in our 12 member department. There were "suggestions" that I should fire her as she wasn't dependable for the field work they needed completed on a tight schedule. I dealt with it by telling those project managers that they could view her as being "fired" from their projects, as I understood their very real concerns about managing the field work scheduling needs for their projects. I shared what I could and told them that I would assign her to less time-sensitive projects, as we had plenty of those too. I also remember a day when we were scheduled for a client lunch with the whole department. Megan came to me with tears in her eyes and asked if she could possibly skip it, as she was not able to put on a happy face and go. Yes, of course! I would simply tell the client that Megan was not feeling well, which was certainly the truth.

In February 2014, the phone call I received from the police telling me that an employee of mine had died, was shocking, of course. Everyone who knew her was shocked and deeply saddened. There was profound grief and sadness the next day at work when I arrived early to let everyone know as they came into the office. As a company, we realized that we often don't know of employees' struggles. I think Megan was more open than many people who "suffer in silence" for a number of reasons. We saw this as a wake-up call for the need for accessible mental health services. We contracted with the Strong Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This EAP program gives all of our employees, and their families access to a variety of counselors at no cost, while remaining anonymous to the employer. It is not tied to our health insurance and there are no co-pays. The EAP has also sent counselors to our office to talk to our staff following deaths of other employees, for a variety of other health issues, mostly cancer. Although stigma is prevalent when it comes to mental illness, this service became part of a solution that we could offer our employees. Even now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this service is available in person or remotely.

We all miss Megan and will always remember her loving, caring ways. She was a very special, loving person to so many who had the privilege to know her.



KIDS RUN LAPS FOR MEG'S GIFT

Kelly Nash has a passion for running and a love for kids that shows as she gives words of encouragement to her young runners during a Lap-A-Thon that raised \$1550 for MEG's Gift. Jack Mandiak, an outgoing 6 year old, is the youngest. He smiles and waves to his mother and grandmother as he rounds the quarter mile track.

The story of how Kelly and MEG's Gift came to be connected starts with Kelly's journey towards better health. After losing her father to a stroke, Kelly became concerned with her own health and decided to try running. "It changed my life," she said. Kelly ran her first marathon in 2007 and has since run 21 more.

In 2012, she became a certified running coach and started "Running with Kelly," which provides individual and group training for persons of all ages and ability levels. Melissa Cushman (Meg's cousin) had a very positive experience training with Kelly and decided that, when the time came, she would enroll her son, Jack, in one of Kelly's youth programs.

Kelly's youth program is modeled after "Kids Run the Nation," a national program developed in response to childhood health concerns in the US. In addition to providing kids with instruction on the mechanics of running, it also emphasizes participation, having fun, and developing a healthy lifestyle.



Coach Croll, Jack, Coach Kelly



**MEG'S GIFT IS ALWAYS
LOOKING FOR NEW
FUNDRAISING IDEAS!**

Are you or an organization you know interested in sponsoring a fundraising event?

Contact Kristie Nadeau at info@megsgift.org

Running for a cause became a part of Kelly's youth program in 2019 after Kelly learned that the mother of one of her participants was out of work recuperating from breast cancer. Kelly wanted to help this single mom and her family. The idea for a Lap-A-Thon was suggested and embraced by the kids and their parents. Each runner solicited donations from their friends and family. The grateful mom agreed to accept the donations if a charitable giving event became a permanent component of the kids program.

Concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on children, Kelly wanted to make sure the organization she chose for 2020 was one that focused on mental health. Jack's mom, Melissa, suggested MEG's Gift and Kelly loved the idea.

Katie Scalzo, a MEG's Gift board member, stopped by the track a week before the Lap-A-Thon to talk to the kids and parents about MEG's Gift. Katie explained how mental health and physical health are connected and offered tips for keeping a healthy mind. During the discussion, she encouraged the kids to identify trusted adults in their lives to whom they can reach out when they feel stressed, sad, or lonely.

Getting back to Jack, he clearly did his part by running 14 laps and collecting \$718 from his supporters. MEG's Gift is grateful to all of the runners and to Kelly for incorporating a spirit of giving into her program and selecting MEG's Gift as the beneficiary of this Lap-A-Thon.

*To learn more about Kelly's programs visit:
www.runningwithkelly.com*

MEG'S GIFT EMBRACED BY MUCH LOVE

A group of craft beverage companies and restaurants in the Greater Rochester area are creating and selling some unique products to raise awareness of mental health. They are donating a portion of sales to local charities, including MEG's Gift. This initiative was started by Kaiden Davis, the beverage manager at Embark Craft Ciderworks in Williamson, NY, to honor his father, Jason, who died suddenly in September. "It did take us by shock," revealed Kaiden, as he talked about his father's death by suicide. He has come to accept that his father suffered from mental health problems that were not readily apparent to him and other members of his family.

Kaiden quickly learned that he was not alone in coping with the loss of a loved one in this manner. This came out when people dropped by to offer their condolences. On the day after Jason's death, cider maker Greg Reuter and Embark co-owner Jacob Lagoner decided to make a cranberry mango cider which they called "Much Love." It sold out quickly and all of the proceeds went to the Davis family. "I was blown away by their generosity," Kaiden said, "and super-inspired by what they did for me."

He reasoned that what they did for him could become a community initiative to raise awareness about mental health and provide financial support to nonprofit organizations that advocate or care for people with mental illness, all while honoring his father. "So I started to have conversations with my friends (in the craft beverage industry and restaurants)," and the response was, "if you set it up, I'm all in." They are collaborative partners in his Much Love Initiative. Each partner creates a beverage or menu item that combines two or more ingredients that are not normally put together. There is symbolism in this for him. It represents bringing people together, each with their quirks, "building community, building togetherness, and knowing you're not alone."

The item is marketed as a Much Love product supporting mental health. Each partner decides when their item is released and the terms of the donation they will be making. Mortalis Brewing produced an Ethiopian coffee, raspberry, and blueberry sour beer in a one-off batch that sold out in a few hours. Chick Magnet, a Penfield restaurant, made a fried chicken cinnamon toast sandwich with apple compote and New York sharp cheddar cheese that was dubbed Much Love Chick. It was on



Kaiden Davis and Tim Garbach

the menu for a month. Irondequoit Beer created a mango habaneros sour stout for Much Love. These businesses donated the proceeds of their sales of these items to MEG's Gift- over \$2100 in total.

More releases from these and other businesses are coming. Kaiden hopes to get jewelry and apparel shops involved. Plans are in the works for a Much Love week of trivia, game nights, and other activities at several venues throughout the community in July. He is also seeking nonprofit status for the Much Love Initiative. Reflecting on what he has accomplished in a short period of time, Kaiden shared: "It's super-rewarding, fun to be able to be out there and effect change, and to be with people and to understand what they are going through, to connect. That makes me happy."

MEG's Gift salutes Kaiden Davis for his contribution to mental health awareness and to the Much Love partners for their generosity.

For more information on the Much Love Initiative, go to Embarkmuchlove.com or @muchloveinitiative on Instagram and Facebook.





MEG's Gift
P.O. Box 876
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*Recipient
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code*

MEG's GIFT INC. is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit charity.

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***"I love you from the top, middle,
and bottom of my heart..."***
(a familiar closing to messages from Meg)



MEG's GIFT HONORED BY EAST HOUSE



*Kathy and Ray Garbach holding
Moving Lives Forward Award*

At its virtual Founders' Day Celebration in November 2020, East House honored MEG's Gift with the Moving Lives Forward Award. This award recognizes individuals and organizations that have shown extraordinary commitment and dedication to supporting individuals in recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorders and their families in the Rochester area. Kim Brumber, President and CEO of East House, stated: "In five short years, MEG's Gift has stayed true to its mission of advocacy and support for mental health organizations through a generosity that has had a ripple effect on our community." In accepting this honor, Ray and Kathy Garbach expressed their appreciation to East House for recognizing the accomplishments of MEG's Gift in advancing Megan's legacy and shared that, in their journey, they have met "so many amazing people from mental health organizations who have become our friends...who are family to us now."