

## Meet Nicole Gagne, CHL's Interim President

*Nicole is excited to help make CHL become  
the best place to give care and the best place to get care.*

At Community Healthlink, we've begun the new year with new leadership. Nicole Gagne became Interim President on January 1, 2016, after long-time President and CEO Deborah Ekstrom retired at the end of 2015.

Immediately before stepping into this role, Nicole served as Executive Vice President, and prior to that she was the Vice President responsible for CHL's homeless, addiction, and primary care services.

Prior to her work at CHL, Nicole was the Executive Director of North Central Human Services in Gardner, and has held various other executive management positions in agencies around the country. Nicole received her Master's degree in Counseling Psychology at Assumption College and has spent the last 25 years working in a variety of settings with children, families, and individuals who are dealing with behavioral health issues.

In addition to her work in treatment settings, Nicole occasionally teaches at area colleges and enjoys speaking at seminars and conferences to help spread enthusiasm about working in the behavioral health sector. During her tenure in Maine, Nicole was instrumental in creating a curriculum and certification program for crisis staff that was adopted across the state.

We asked Nicole a few questions about her new role and her expectations for the coming year. Her answers are below.

*What are you excited about working on at CHL as you begin your tenure as Interim President?*

We have so many exciting things happening at CHL right now. We have committed to becoming the best place to give care and the best place to get care, and we have a number of initiatives in four areas to accomplish this. Our initiatives include: 1) Expanding integrated care; 2) Increasing our capacity to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services; 3) Increasing staff inclusion and engagement; 4) Increasing LEAN thinking and implemented ideas; and 5) Ensuring fiscal stability.



The most exciting part is that we're getting participation from individuals all across the organization, including front line staff who really know what the work looks like and have positive and helpful feedback on how to achieve our goals.

*What are some of the biggest challenges CHL is facing this year?*

As our society becomes more open minded and aware of the challenges of addiction and mental health issues, more people are seeking treatment than ever before. This is exciting but incredibly challenging for a system that has been underfunded for many years and challenged with building capacity.

CHL, like many similar organizations, is facing significant needs in areas of facilities and infrastructure. These are areas that are typically funded only through donations. We also need to continue to advocate at the state and national level for funding parity for mental health care.

*How do you plan to keep donors and supporters up to date?*

CHL is expanding the way we talk to you, our donors, and supporters. We will continue to send issues of Newslink, continue to interact through social media, and plan to offer specific opportunities for you to connect with me and other members of our senior team throughout the year. ■

# You helped Zoey learn how to handle her emotions and stay in preschool

*Because of you, Zoey and her parents learned how to handle strong emotions in a healthy and safe manner through CHL's "Together For Kids" program.*

What would you do if you found your young child facing expulsion from preschool for exhibiting violent behavior? How could you get to the bottom of what was causing the behavior and help your child learn to express herself differently?

For Marie\*, the answer was CHL's Together For Kids program.

Marie and her husband were overjoyed to welcome two adopted sisters into their home; the older was just three and a half years old, and the younger sister, Zoey, was a baby.

Three months before her third birthday, Zoey entered preschool. Within a few months, she began exhibiting angry and violent behavior that grew in intensity and frequency. Zoey would hit fellow students and teachers when she was unhappy with a given situation.

"We felt confusion," says Marie. "We didn't know what was causing it." There was a high amount of teacher turnover in Zoey's classroom, but Marie wasn't sure if that was the cause or only one factor in many.

Fortunately, Zoey's preschool was a participant in CHL's Together For Kids (TFK) program. TFK is an early childhood behavioral health consultation program that is designed to address behavior problems in young children. TFK helps educators and families implement strategies that will reduce a child's challenging behavior, encourage appropriate social skills, strengthen home-school partnerships, and reduce suspensions and expulsions from early education and care settings.

Gloria Pierce, a Clinician with TFK, came to Zoey's school to observe her behavior. Gloria learned that whenever there was any sort of transition in Zoey's classroom – the class moving from one activity to another, children coming and going, or visitors coming to the classroom – Zoey would be visually shaken by the experience. Gloria recognized that Zoey was not able to cope with how these transitions made her feel, and she also wasn't able to express her feelings in any way other than through violence.

Marie says that she and her husband were worried because they knew that if Zoey's behavior didn't change, she was at risk of expulsion from school. "It was happening more than



once a week and the school was documenting each occasion," says Marie. "I knew where it was headed."

Fortunately, Zoey and her family began to meet with Gloria for weekly therapy sessions. Gloria also convened meetings between Zoey's parents and the classroom teachers so they could all understand the therapeutic approach Gloria was taking with Zoey and how they could help to reinforce that approach. They all learned tools and vocabulary they could use with Zoey – to be able to help Zoey learn to identify what different emotions might look like, what causes them, and how to tell others about her emotions.

Marie says it has really helped her as a parent, "to be able to communicate with your child and have a common language so everybody understands each other." Gloria taught them games to play to strengthen that shared vocabulary as well. "We played Candy Land," Marie explains, "and each color represented an emotion. So when you land on that color, everyone would have to talk about a time when we felt that emotion, and find out what makes each other feel that emotion – happiness, sadness, frustration, whatever." Zoey learned how to tell other children and teachers how she was feeling – saying "I don't like that," or "stop doing that," as opposed to using violence.

Of her family's experience with TFK, Marie says, "We're much more relaxed and confident now that everything we chose to do was the right thing to do. We haven't had any incidents of physical behavior from Zoey at home or at school since she started seeing Gloria." ■

\* Names changed at the client's request.

# A season of giving, sharing, and wellness - we couldn't have done it without you

*The holiday season was filled with opportunities for our clients - thanks to generous support from you, our loyal donors and funders. Without that support, none of these great events or programs could exist.*



CHL's Homeless Outreach and Advocacy Program staff received gifts in December for their clients courtesy of the Central MA Regional Council of the National Association of Social Workers.



Also in December, clients from our Developmental Disabilities Unit and their families enjoyed a holiday party with donated food and live music performed by CHL's own Jaques Ave 5 ensemble.



Our Respite Bed program participated in the Great American Smokeout in November. They were able to create "quit smoking survival kits" and give them to clients who were ready to stop smoking.



Our annual HOAP Thanksgiving meal for homeless clients was a success. Dozens of clients enjoyed the meal, which included food donated from local business and staff, many of whom contributed dishes that they made.



In October, we celebrated the opening of the Spruce Street Wellness Center in Leominster, CHL's newest integrated primary care clinic, with an open house.



In November, CHL's Developmental Disabilities Unit graduated from MyPlate, an 8-week nutrition class generously supported by a grant from Unum.

*Newslink*, CHL's newsletter,  
is published several times each year.

Questions and comments can  
be directed to:

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## *Carolyn Droser - a recognition of excellence*



This fall, CHL Vice President Carolyn Droser (pictured on left, with Deborah Ekstrom, on right) received the Robert A. Dorwart, M.D. Award from the Association for Behavioral Healthcare, which is given annually in Massachusetts to an individual in the field of mental health who has demonstrated significant leadership in community mental health. Carolyn has been a long-time leader at CHL whose colleagues and staff recognize her unfailing integrity, loyalty, judgment, honesty and creativity as hallmarks of her character and reasons for her success. Congratulations to Carolyn! We're so proud to have her with us at CHL.

## *My Gift To Help Adults, Children, and Families Recover*

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