



December 2021

Greetings Families, Friends and Patrons of Quality Life Concepts!

Great Falls Office

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You have probably noticed the shortage of workers everywhere you look. Restaurants are closing early and opening later. Everything seems to take longer—whether it be an Amazon delivery, getting a meal to your table, reduced menu options, standing in line at the store, or getting groceries stocked onto shelves. Appointments are scheduled weeks instead of days out. Hospitals are full, surgeries are postponed, oxygen and medications are not as readily available. Employers at Walmart, Home Depot, and other retailers have increased starting wages to \$14 or more per hour.

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In the world of direct care and providing services to people in need, those very same issues exist. Pre-COVID, our staff census was 172 persons. At this writing, we have 115 determined souls who are dedicated to making sure the people we serve are safe. We too have increased our starting wages and added sign-on and retention incentives for our staff. Yet, there are some glaring differences in those work force and supply chain issues. We are not McDonalds or KFC. We don't get to close early or open late. We don't get to raise our prices or 'reduce our menu'—the needs of the people we serve are the same needs whether there are four of us on site, or just one of us. Our dining rooms don't close, and drive-through-only is not an option. We don't get to take a day off without worrying that we are leaving a co-worker short, or worse yet, not getting to something that needs immediate attention. Most of us don't remember what a stress-free long weekend looks like. Emergencies, illnesses, celebrations, counseling, medical care, stubbed toes, lost teddy bears, housemate squabbles, hospitalizations, clogged toilets, lost keys, our real and perceived crisis continues—pandemic or not.

Conrad Office

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The toll on personal and family lives this last two years has been unprecedented. Yet I am happy to say, QLC's team of people has not lost our focus or compassion for our people or our work. Here are some of the interesting issues we have faced:

- With little notice, another provider called to say they were going to close their day program due to COVID, and later called to say they didn't have enough staff to keep people safe, but the QLC team, despite our own staff shortages, rallied to meet the daytime needs of the folks who were affected.
- People who typically only work in the office have jumped in to help with transportation, cleaning, grocery shopping and delivery, and even preparing meals so that staff can dedicate time to other care needs in our sites.
- Staff have agreed to work longer days and give up scheduled time off to meet the ongoing needs of their clients.
- When a person who left our services years ago recently passed away, the state-appointed guardian's authority ended with his death, which resulted in his cremains being deserted at the funeral home. *It was our staff who wrote his*



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obituary and ultimately reunited him with lost family members. And, while his is a happier story, we do have other clients whose ashes remain with us today because family did not or could not claim them for whatever reason.

- Life happens, and crisis sometimes redirects our attention, causing us to lose touch with people we love. Such was the case when we were recently contacted by a guardian seeking to reconnect with her ward. The reunion was sweet and full of joy but at one point, the guardian turned to our staff, tearfully apologizing for 'abandoning' this person. Our staff just as tearfully responded to her by telling her there were no worries. The staff had continued to provide Christmas and birthday gifts in her name during her absence...thereby assuring her presence even though she had been unavailable.

Not all needs are about baths and showers and getting to work. Not all budgets are about transportation and salaries. A short year-end letter doesn't do justice to the ongoing kinds of support we provide or to the very human connections we make every day. This last fiscal year allowed us to cover nearly \$13,000 in assistance that helped defray costs of medications, beds, food, clothing, and yes, even Christmas presents for the people we care about. **We can only do that because of your generous giving.** This isn't a typical year-end letter. It hasn't been a typical year. For the second year in a row, our lives have been dictated by circumstances and needs that would have been hard to imagine not so long ago. Caring for people is challenging, even more so in our current COVID-driven world. But the people who do this work, just like you, our friends and patrons, are also some of the kindest, most dedicated people on the face of this planet.

Please consider a year-end donation of \$100, \$50, \$25 or your most generous gift to QLC and help us continue to address the needs of Montanans with developmental disabilities.

With gratitude,

Lori Wertz, CEO
Quality Life Concepts