

The Smithtown News

Dimensions of Living

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Thrift Shop Building Friendships and Skills

“Shop Local” has taken on a whole new meaning at the Options for Community Living Thrift Shop in Ronkonkoma thanks to the support of the community and the dedication of its workers and volunteers.

The Options Thrift Shop opened its doors in 1991 to provide pre-vocational training for residents who live in Options for Community Living’s supported housing programs for adults recovering from mental illness.

Today, there are about ten Options volunteers who are paired with community volunteers to work on developing their retail and customer service skills. Over the years, Options residents have parlayed this vocational training into paid employment at various Long Island retail establishments. Despite a paid job, however, many Options residents still continue to volunteer at the Thrift Shop.

Options resident Charlie R. has developed a strong bond while working with Thrift Shop volunteer Paul Bocci from Nesconset. “It is not likely that I would have crossed paths with Charlie without Options,” said Mr. Bocci, who began volunteering at the Shop when he found himself at loose ends in retirement. “Today, I’m proud to call Charlie my ‘brother from another mother.’ I also cannot adequately express the respect I have for him, for all the volunteers who work here as well as for everything that Options for Community Living does to help people in need.”

For his part, Charlie is a highly dedicated individual who loves working at the Shop and even received an unexpected benefit from volunteering. The 72-year-old walks two miles to and from the Thrift Shop to get to work, which his doctor



Options Resident Charlie R. (top, left), who has developed a strong bond while working with Thrift Shop volunteer Paul Bocci from Nesconset, get to work tagging items, while Linda Longo (left) and volunteer Maryann Rossi look over merchandise in anticipation of a busy holiday season.



credits with helping Charlie to significantly improve his cardiac health.

“The people affiliated with Options Thrift Shop are one big family,” said Linda Longo, Community Resources Coordinator for Options for Community Living. “Thrift Shop volunteers, customers and donors are devoted to one another, to our store and to our mission. I usually can tell the day of the week and the time of the day by who is in the store at any given time.”

Established in 1982, Options for Community Living, Inc. operates residential programs for adults recovering from mental illness and affordable supported housing and care coordination services for individuals and families with chronic health conditions.

Options’ mission to assist people to live independently and with dignity in the community has grown through the years to serve more than 1,500 adults and children annually.

Options Thrift Shop is beautifully decorated and fully stocked for the holiday shopping season. Stop by to discover your “ugly sweater” to wear to a holiday gathering or browse around the Shop for festive wreaths, centerpieces, ornaments, plants, and so much more all lovingly crafted by Options residents who volunteer their time at the agency greenhouse and craft room. In addition to seasonal items, the Thrift Shop has numerous household, clothing, toys, etc., items for sale.