

# THE TILLEGRAM

Winter 2016

Toward Independent Living and Learning, Inc.

## From the President



Dear Friends, Families, and Colleagues,

We simply couldn't wait another six months before sharing some of the wonderful things that have happened at TILL since our summer edition TILLeGram, therefore we put together this mid-year issue for your reading pleasure.

It has been a particularly busy time as we create new housing options for people with Acquired Brain Injury and furiously completing our new 61 unit apartment building with 5 bedroom group home in Charlestown, hoping to beat the winter weather. We are delighted that our agency has been recognized by our colleagues with the 2015 Providers' Council Innovator of the Year Award for TILL's Living Legacy Project.

Our fall International Ambassador trip again emphasized the power of global connections to stimulate our thinking and creativity as we shared information with our counterparts in Germany. The exchange between our travelers, including staff and those receiving services from TILL created some wonderful exchanges which we continued after we returned home. Our visitors from Israel offered yet another opportunity to learn from other cultures with regard to community inclusion and developmental disabilities.

Being recognized by the Commonwealth Institute's Top 100 Women-Led Businesses in MA was a great honor. I was most flattered to be listed as #27 along with 99 other women entrepreneurs, founders and CEOs. Our employee workforce is comprised of a remarkable group of people who are committed to the well-being and growth of individuals and families who make such a distinction possible. Thank you for doing what you do each and every day to create our wonderful organization.

I wish all of our readers a happy and healthy New Year and look forward to continued growth and innovation in 2016.

Sincerely,  
**Dafna Krouk-Gordon**  
Founder and President,  
TILL, Inc.



## TILL Games 2015

TILL Games, the annual track event open to athletes of all ages and all abilities, celebrated its 21st year on September 12, 2015 at the Reggie Lewis Athletic Center in Roxbury. Over 200 participants came together to challenge themselves and their peers in many events including running, walking, power and manual wheelchair race events.

TILL thanks our business partners at **Santander Bank** for their generous sponsorship; **Whole Foods** for their healthy snacks to keep our energy high; **Friends of TILL Games** for their ongoing support; Our **team members and fans** who make the day a true success, and the **athletes** who inspire us all with their determination!



# Autism Support Center



TILL's Autism Support Center provides support and learning opportunities for children and adolescents up to age 22 with autism spectrum disorder *and their families*.

**Social Skills and the City (SSATC)** is a new interactive, drop off program designed to teach life skills in actual social and community settings for teens and young adults on the autism spectrum.

Volunteers from Boston University provided one on one skill training and peer interaction under the guidance of ASC staff, developing appropriate social interaction/friendship building, T safety and navigation, transitioning between activities, following schedules, money management, and much more!



## CARF International Survey and Accreditation Results

TILL's Day Habilitation and TILL Central programs recently completed their certification survey through CARF International, the accreditation organization which evaluates and certifies programs throughout the United States and Canada. Our sixth consecutive CARF certification has once again resulted in a three year certification, the highest achievement one can attain!

TILL recognizes the wonderful work of our team of professionals who make this certification possible: the direct support professionals who oversee each program site; the clinical staff who implement the many specialized services for which our day habilitation services are known; the administrative support staff; the human resources, facilities, and financial departments; and the oversight of your Vice president of Program Services. This teamwork is vital to providing the excellent quality of our day habilitation programs.

The CARF Survey Team reviews compliance in 850 standards and though the team concentrated on day services, part of their survey assessment includes an overview of the management and soundness of our entire agency.

Some of the specific points highlighted included indicators related to the following: exemplary leadership within the agency and on a state wide level; encouragement of independent decision makers among the management staff while holding each accountable for performance; sound management and financial systems leading to consistent

financial stability and allowing the development of creative options; excellent systems which measure outcomes and systems followed through to completion; creative and frequent methods of staff recognition; diversity of our staff and our commitment to utilizing the strengths which such diversity in the workplace brings; staff compassion and enthusiasm; pride and knowledge of TILL's culture; team members possessing a clear sense of ownership in programs while also believing in the organization's mission and methods.



TILL received what we consider the two highest compliments at the exit interview conducted by the CARF Survey Team; the administrative surveyor commented that he wished he had the opportunity to work in a "TILL-like agency" when he was first starting out in human services so that he could have learned many of the best practices seen here; the program surveyor stated that if he had a family member who needed these supports, he would want his family member served in one of our day programs. As they finalized their summary, the CARF Survey Team echoed TILL's goals for continuous quality improvement, and never settling for the status quo.



## TILL's International Ambassador visit Neuerkerode Community in Braunschweig, Germany

Toward Independent Living and Learning, Inc. (TILL) is pleased to announce the return of the 2015 International Ambassadors to Germany: (L-R) Blake Reef, Springboard member; John Stevens, Director Special Projects; Nancy Quinn-Gonsalves, Residence Manager, Weymouth; Lurdes Arruda, HR Generalist; Dafna Krouk-Gordon, President; Augustine Fornikipor, Residence Manager, Roslindale; and Elizabeth McCourt, who lives in one of TILL's residential homes. Our international visits which have included England, Poland, Costa Rica, Hungary and China, offer a stimulating way to broaden our horizons through global travel.

The seven travelers arrived in Germany on September 25, 2015 and spent their first weekend in Berlin, touring this historic city. Berlin's post-WWII reconstruction pays

respect to those who were victims of the Nazi regime, and the travelers found the Jewish Holocaust Memorial and the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, recreated using original materials, particularly haunting. Navigating the city with very little sleep was a challenge at first, but resulted in some unexpected discoveries, like happening upon a lively Oktoberfest celebration and TK Maxx, the German branch of TJ Maxx where Elizabeth is employed!



Leaving Berlin, the ambassadors traveled to Braunschweig with Peter Savic from the Neuerkerode community. Peter and members of the integrated rock group "The Mix" met up with TILL when they were in Boston for their North American tour, and Peter kindly facilitated the ambassadors' visit. The group was thrilled to experience local culture and made many observations about both similarities and differences.

The ambassadors spent the week visiting Neuerkerode Village which provides a variety of services including work opportunities at their farm, garden center, workshop, bakery, catering and school food



service kitchen; mental health services; a senior center, residences for 850 people in various arrangements as well as apartments outside of the village. Nearby Ostfalia University provides special education teacher training and the ambassadors were welcomed by Professor Brombach and her students for an informative meeting on education standards, training and employment.

Self-expression through music and arts is a large part of Neuerkerode culture. One of the highlights for the ambassadors was experiencing the integration of music in a variety of areas; developing skills with the Hand in Hand and Under Rock bands, and using music to teach inclusion at the local elementary school. The travelers participated in one of the music workshops where they broke into groups, learned a song and took turns performing for each other.



TILL Ambassadors returned inspired with new ideas, including plans to create an integrated TILL band, and hosting International Ambassador at Home cultural dinners!

Danka schon to the Neuerkerode community for hosting TILL's 2015 International Ambassadors. We are looking forward to hosting members of their community at TILL in the future.





## TILL Living Legacy Receives Innovator of the Year Award

Toward Independent Living and Learning received the 2015 Providers' Council Innovator of the Year Award for TILL's Living Legacy Project, at the Massachusetts Council of Human Service Providers' 40th Annual Convention on October 19, 2015.

TILL's Living Legacy Project was developed as an innovative response to both the challenges faced in creating enriching training opportunities for Human Service Professionals and family concerns about retaining the histories and knowledge of their loved ones as only one who has lived it would know. These life histories, produced with sensitivity and respect utilizing the expertise and talents of an oral historian, combined with our focused curriculum and discussion guide, challenge the participant to view the world from a different historical perspective.

TILL's Living Legacy Project is a component of our staff training curriculum and has also been presented to students in the Massachusetts Urban Youth Collaborative Program, Department of Developmental Services executives, service providers and family members.

As a direct response to the impact this project has had on our staff members, individuals and families, we have recently embarked on a new phase, empowering our residential teams with tools and training to teach the value of preserving their stories and inspiring them to create their own Living Legacy.



(L-R) Paula Aiesi, Director of Community Connections; Dafna Krouk-Gordon, TILL Founder and President; Alice Flynn, Living Legacy Project family member.

## TILL Named to Top 100 Women-Led Businesses

TILL, Inc. has been named as one of the Top 100 Women-Led Businesses in Massachusetts by the Commonwealth Institute! The Top 100 Women-Led Businesses were celebrated at the Seaport Boston Hotel on October 23, 2015.

For the past 14 years, the Commonwealth Institute ranks both for-profit and nonprofit women-led businesses in Massachusetts based on a formula of revenue or operating budget, number of full-time

employees, workplace and management diversity, and innovative projects.

**TILL's Dafna Krouk-Gordon proudly placed #27 in this celebrated listing of Top 100 Women-Led Businesses!**

The Top 100 ranked list appeared in the October 25th Women and Power edition of the Boston Globe magazine.



(L-R) Donna Parker, Dir. Administrative Support; Christine Sweeney, VP Human Resources; Mary Stanley, Dir. Health Services; Bob Coletta, Sr. VP Santander Bank; Ed Castelli, Dir. Residential Services; John Stevens, Dir. Special Projects; Dafna Krouk-Gordon, TILL Founder and President; Kevin Stock, VP Finance; Linda Norton, Dir. Marketing and Communication; Stephen Fay, Principal KLR.

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