

Toward Independent Living and Learning, Inc.



from the ground up

Billerica Day Program to Get a Home of its Own in Chelmsford

The square footage of an all-new TILL Day Program site under construction in Chelmsford will not be radically different from its current space in Billerica. The distance between the two will be less than three miles. Yet the customized configuration of the new building will provide all sorts of additional amenities and opportunities that will make it seem a world away.

When Dafna Krouk-Gordon first envisioned replacing the day program’s longtime leased office park space with a home of its own, Director of Day and Vocational Services Marilyn Kuhn’s first priority went beyond its interior. “On the top of my wish list for the program,” she said, was “to have an outdoor space.” She will get her wish and so much more.

“This building will allow for beautiful outdoor space as well as new

space for a training and educational center,” adds Vice President of Program Services Sandy Cummins. “The building design will allow for more efficient functional space that can be modified as we need it.”

The design, notes Marilyn, has parallels to another property TILL built from scratch, Watertown’s Day Program. A system of connecting doors allows staff to adjust the size of the interior space, easily accommodating small and large groups depending on the activity.

More bonuses: the kitchen areas will allow for cooking groups. The new building will have dedicated space for staff trainings as well as customized classroom space, which will keep interruptions to a minimum. Plus, visitors will have plenty of parking. All of this is unimaginable in the existing Billerica site.



“Starting with land rather than an existing building means that the space can be designed with the program needs in mind rather than trying to fit the program into a space that might have been designed for something else,” says Marilyn. Completion is scheduled for late 2026.



IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 - NEW HOMES SPRING UP
- 3 - BLAZE A NEW PATH
- 4 - MEMORIES, LOST AND FOUND
- 6 - THE BRONZE STAGE
- 7 - WINNERS FOR WINTER
- 7 - ABOVE AND BEYOND AWARDS
- 8 - SHOPS EXPAND THE BRAND
- 8 - CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends, Families, and Colleagues,



Why do we do this?

It seems like a simple enough question yet unless we say it loud, say it proud and say it often, we may not remember what is so special about being in this field called human services. It is especially important to be clear about the reasons at this time because on a daily basis we are barraged with governmental decisions we don't understand, economic decisions over which we seem to have no control, and divisive rhetoric about differences that we thought we were well beyond.

"We," the collective we of human services professionals at TILL, continue to work in this field by choice, not by default. We know that there is no better way to spend one's time than by connecting to others and helping them turn their dreams into reality through our engagement with them.

As we complete our yearlong celebration of TILL's 45th anniversary year, we are ready to begin the next chapter. In this issue of The TILLgram, we recognize the many ways in which we live, work and play, together with the individuals we support.

As you know, TILL's culture is one of growth. If we are too content with where we are, we not only become stationary, we go backwards, something we never want to do. Our plans for 2026 embrace this desire to keep moving forward and include new consulting projects where we can share our expertise, new program development and continued international travel to learn from others and share our knowledge. Our focus on creating supports for those who are aging is balanced by our goal to be creative and welcoming to younger people entering the world of adult services.

To all the direct care employees, managers, specialists, clinicians, administrators and senior management team - a sincere thank you for being part of this profession and most importantly for choosing TILL through which to share your talents. Your optimism and energy are key to creating a bright future for the families and individuals we support.

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



Stay in Touch

Email info@tillinc.org to receive the latest news via email, update your mailing address or find out more about TILL's services. Keep up with news, events and more by following us on socialmedia.tillinc.org/social-link



this & that

FUTURE MADNESS

Nothing says April Madness like a DeLorean time machine in TILL's Dedham parking lot on a Sunday afternoon. This year's theme, based on the film trilogy "Back to the Future," will inspire fun and friendly competition as residences and day programs complete their "quests" during this five-week annual event sponsored by Community Connections. Good luck to all of our April Madness competitors.



GRAND TOUR

Sarah Peterson, Commissioner of DDS, along with Kelly Lawless and Christopher Klaskin also of DDS recently toured several TILL programs with Dafna Krouk-Gordon. From the microunits in Chelsea to Charlestown's Bridgeview apartment building and group home, our visitors were impressed as individuals showed off their living and program areas, progress and accomplishments.

ANOTHER MODEL OF INCLUSION

Always looking to learn from others, TILL's management team will visit Camphill Village, a "vibrant lifesharing community dedicated to being a modern and fulfilling life choice for adults with developmental differences" in Copake, NY. Home to 230 adults of all abilities, this inclusive village is self-sustaining, featuring a farm, beehive, cattle, weavery and bakery.

NEW CAPITAL FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE

Merrimack, NH, will be the new home for Cravings Cafe and Gift Shop and our administrative office, both currently in Nashua. Our project, recently approved for construction, will also include two three-bedroom apartments.

MIX, MATCH, FIND A CATCH

Springboard Social Club is hosting the first of a series of "Mix and Match" events for neurodiverse singles looking to meet others on May 3 at "Putt across America" and "Ned Devine's" at Boston's Faneuil Hall. This event is open to non-Springboard members.

new homes spring up in north shore, central mass.

NORTHBORO

In November, individuals from one of TILL's Westboro residences moved to their new home in Northboro. "It was evident how excited and joyful the individuals were upon their move," writes Sarah Mingi, Residence Manager.

Residential Assistant Director Gneba Kokoura notes it is "a space designed from the ground up to offer comfort, accessibility, and a true

sense of belonging. Cooking together in the brand new kitchen has become a favorite routine, and evenings often include watching sports on the new 65 inch TV. The house has quickly become a place where everyone feels at home."

One individual summed it up best: "Lyman Street Westboro is in the past; Northboro is our new home and we love it here."



DANVERS

According to Residential Assistant Director Carmen Cruz, the open concept of the new Forest Street home in Danvers is "just what is needed for a more inviting feel." Designed as an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) home emphasizing accessibility, it features three bedrooms, two bathrooms,

functional countertops, modern appliances, high ceilings and lots of natural lighting. There are two decks, one in the back of the house for privacy and dining, where the individuals and staff look forward to holding spring and summer cookouts.



TILL staff blaze a new path

"TILL has always prioritized the growth and development of our employees, and this is another exciting pathway," says Vice President of Program Services Sandy Cummings of a new program providing free education, college credits and even a financial stipend.

As part of a federal grant, TILL, in partnership with BayPath University, developed a 14-week training offering three free college credits, a high-quality learning experience, plus a generous financial stipend of up to \$4,200 upon completion of the course. TILL Pathways began in January with 15 TILL staff members.

One of those pioneers for this program is Linda Belcher-White, Individual Support Manager and

Chelsea Microunit Manager. Linda began working with TILL as a relief staff member in 2014 and transitioned to full-time work for six years before taking a break to explore a different direction. Last year, the opportunity with the micro units in Chelsea drew her back to TILL.

Reading a flyer about Pathways, Linda enrolled and was accepted for the first cohort. "The program is wonderful," she says. "I am both learning new information and relearning things I experienced during my previous time working for TILL. The information I'm learning is practical and can be used daily."

Even areas such as transportation, which she is not personally responsible for, provide her with

valuable knowledge in case someone at the micro units needs assistance. Courses are asynchronous to fit various schedules and are open to staff who are MA residents. Up to 15 staff members, from any department at TILL, will be accepted into each of the three remaining sessions. Those seeking to continue on a career path in human services working directly with clients with medical specialization are encouraged to apply.

"I believe this program would greatly benefit both new employees entering the human services field and current staff," adds Linda. "It not only refreshes knowledge but also provides exposure to areas they may not have previously experienced."



memories, lost and found

A Residence Manager in Charlestown Helps an Individual Reclaim the Good Times

Carolyn is having a difficult day. Benjamin Aryee, Residence Manager at TILL's Charlestown residence where Carolyn has lived for six years, clearly has seen days like this before. With no family, Carolyn relies on Ben as the person who knows her best and is clearly her greatest advocate.

"At 86 years old, she moves through the group home with a quiet certainty, as if her feet remember what her mind sometimes forgets," he writes. "Dementia has softened some of her memories, folded time in unusual ways, but there is still a part of her that holds on to the rhythms of her days. She knows where things belong—her cardigan on the back of the chair, her favorite cup in the second cabinet, the blanket folded just so at the edge of her bed.

What surprises everyone most is how well she knows the staff's schedule. She'll glance toward the door a moment before the morning staff arrives, nodding as if to say, "There you are. Right on time." In the evenings, she settles herself before the night shift walks in, already expecting the sound of familiar footsteps."

Upon meeting Carolyn and Ben, it is initially jarring to see her confused and angrily dressing him down. He lets it all slide, calmly and reassuringly re-directing her attention.

Prior to joining TILL in 2010, Ben was a senior mental health worker and a residential counselor. Working as both a residential support professional and day support professional through 2015, he





left to further his education, then returned as a residence manager in 2021. In the five years he has known Carolyn, Ben has seen changes in her brought on by the progression of her condition. She loses interest quickly and is easily agitated. This afternoon, her frustration seems directed at Ben. No matter how many times she criticizes, he remains calm and affirming, exuding patience and optimism, “understanding that people learn in different ways, and always knowing that there is light at the end of the tunnel.”

Knowing Carolyn so well has enabled Ben to develop strategies to recalibrate her mood. “Having a one- to-one with her has always helped, having her come and sit in the office and have conversations about the past, sometimes about the future,” he reflects. “At times showing her pictures of things she had achieved, going to the casino, restaurants and of course going fishing.”

The fishing trip is one of the greatest adventures which the five women who live in Charlestown have taken together. Ben and the residents also enjoy

getting dressed up and going out to restaurants, karaoke and gathering around the TV together. Group activities like these help the residents bond and respond empathetically to the changes in Carolyn.

“I had explained to each individual that she is going through some hard times and can’t control herself,” Ben explained. “They all seem to understand and are extremely nice and supportive of her.”

The grace and patience they extend to Carolyn is role-modelled by Ben. By the end of our visit, the two of them are laughing together in his office.

“Even as dementia reshapes her world, these small anchors remain—places, objects, routines, people,” he reflects. “They give her comfort, and in her own way, she gives something back: a gentle reminder that memory isn’t only about facts and dates. It’s also about the deep, steady knowing that lives in the heart, guiding her through each day with quiet grace.”

Note: TILL supports individuals through all phases of life. In 2025, TILL launched an all-new training for staff called Dementia Live, an experience that immerses staff into what life might be like living with cognitive impairment and sensory change, empowering care partners with tools to improve communication, care processes, relationship building and the environment.





the bronze stage

For Participants in Career Development Program
TILL Edge, It's One Down, Three to Go

Three employees have scaled the first of the four summits to complete TILL EDGE (Employee Development and Growth toward Excellence), which recognizes the strengths and interests of employees and provides training and experience to help them advance within the agency.

IT Specialist Alex Tisme, Senior Day Support Professional Judith Benjamin and Residence Manager Benjamin Aryee have achieved bronze status, putting them on track to complete the silver, gold and platinum levels. Ben's focus for the bronze level was Massachusetts compliance and internal TILL quality checks and balances.

"He spent quality time with his cluster of homes using TILL's auditing tools and guidance materials conducting a comprehensive audit of the location, summarization of outcomes, and consultation with the manager on action steps," said Director of Quality Assurance Ed Castelli, who mentors Ben and evaluates his progress.

"I saw an opportunity to challenge myself through the TILL Edge program," Ben explained. He focused primarily on TILL and DDS licensure and certification standards and will be implementing measures to train supervisors in proper practice.

In more than 17 years working at ETC, Judith steadily moved up the ladder. She was promoted from relief to food service professional to day support professional and senior day support professional where she launched Fitness Center Zumba and gym classes for ETC clients. Her supervisor, ETC Program Manager Gina Shulimson, proposed TILL Edge to take her career to the next level.

"I encouraged Judith to participate in Edge because I saw the need for ETC to look to the future," Gina explained. Even after 37 years, paperwork remains an important part of Gina's job. She noticed that Judith already kept copious notes on the progress of individuals. Based on such attention to detail and Judith's interaction with individuals, Gina saw a potential future leader.

"In all the years I've known her, Judith has been the most consistent person when it comes to dealing with the individuals," Gina observed. "Her behavioral approach is always on target. She understands the individuals and commands their respect and affection."

To help Judith get to the bronze level, Gina worked with her on client administrative papers, family and residential communications

and behavioral approaches and interventions. The experience has already made an impact.

"Being a part of TILL Edge is a way to further my career goals, to utilize my skills, experience, and passion," Judith wrote.

Working in IT, Alex Tisme had ideas that could provide TILL staff with "enhanced security without becoming disruptive to staff." The challenge was to find the time to explore big picture ideas for the agency while navigating the intense day-to-day demands of his job.

"While I began with approximately 10 different ideas, the TILL Edge guidelines helped me narrow my focus and fully develop one initiative: delivering standardized password policies across the organization," Alex explained. The program "provided a framework that helped turn those ideas into actionable goals."

To reach the bronze level, Alex worked with Operations Support to create an internal awareness and communications campaign, reviewed industry standards and best practices, and collaborated with senior management to ensure the policy balanced strong security with usability.

Chief Financial Officer Yesim Taskor, who oversees IT, describes Alex's involvement as "practical and applied, tied directly to real work rather than theoretical learning."

"Moving forward," Alex said, "I aim to build password reset routines and security processes that not only improve protection but also educate users on the importance of cybersecurity in a practical, approachable way."

Next stop for Alex, Judith and Ben is to join IT's Christopher Desjardins and Accounting's Jim Pierre, EDGE participants who achieved Bronze Level in 2025, and embark on the silver phase.



the winners for winter

“Safety doesn’t take a snow day,” writes TILL’s ever-popular Director of Transportation Michael Tartt. Mike, along with staff members Victor Matos and Daniel Gromet, recently implemented the Fleet Safety Award Program to encourage pride in TILL’s fleet of vehicles. Our Doris Road home in Bedford and Fenwick Drive in Chelmsford took home the first two awards. Mike also announced that Dana Avenue in Hyde Park is the winner of the Winter Preparedness Challenge. The next challenge for TILL fleet drivers will be for Vehicle Cleanliness. “We want to make sure we always take the time to celebrate the hard work happening out in the field,” adds Mike. “Thank you all for sticking with us, pushing through the winter weather, and keeping our residents moving safely. Let’s keep that momentum going!”

dafna and company turn it up to 11

TILL had been one of the Top 100 Women-led Businesses in Massachusetts every year for the past decade. So, in 2025, when The Women’s Edge and The Boston Globe extended the honor to eleven consecutive years, it might have seemed like numbers-wise, there was no place to go. Not so. Consider that TILL is also one of six companies on the TOP 100 list where 100 percent of upper management (VP or higher) is women; one of seven companies on the Top 100 list whose board of directors comprise 70 percent or more women; and one of 28 companies whose workforce is 25-49 percent women of color. In an organization where diversity has been a foundational part of our history and our future, these stats speak volumes about our identity. We’re grateful to stand among the inspiring women on the list, leaders who are driving impact and innovation across the Commonwealth.

above & beyond awards

TILL’s Professional Development Committee awards a certificate of appreciation to employees who have gone that extra step in the performance of their duties. From March 2025 through February 2026 they included:

Alex Tisme
IT Specialist, Technology Services

Ahmed Aboeldahab
Bookkeeper, Finance Department

Dawn Lemay-Dube
Director of Day and Vocational Services, NH

Stephen Bonnah
Day Support Professional, Billerica Day

Lucy Carimbocas
Relief Staff, Dedham

Theresa Driscoll
Director of Marketing and Communication

Urvi Shah
Clinician, Strattus Mental Health Clinic

Sheree Wynter
Assistant Director, Residential Services

Gneba Kokoura
Assistant Director, Residential Services

Katelyn Sheridan
Farm Manager, TILL Farms

Esther Brown
Residence Manager, Sandy Brook A, Burlington
And the entire residential team

Joseph Ddamulira
Residence Manager, Sandy Brook B, Burlington
And the entire residential team

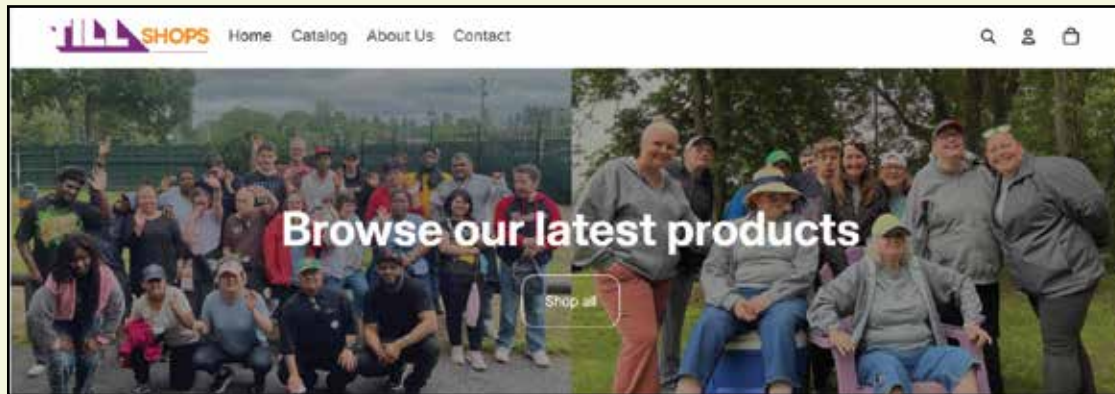
Community Ambassador Awards for Outstanding Volunteers

Deb Goodman, Goodman Advisory Group
ETC Volunteer

Mercedes Orozco, Educator
ETC Volunteer



TILL Shops expand the brand



demand—especially valuable for limited runs of holiday-themed items. “You can make just three and when it sells out, it sells out.”

As a former member of TILL’s IT staff, Caleb is enthusiastic about the technology Shopify

brings to the endeavor. He compares the catalogue section to a “gallery” where you can see all the products in thumbnail views. And, he notes, their portal hooks into TikTok, Instagram and Facebook, making it possible to buy items on these apps, opening opportunities for additional visibility and impulse purchases.

With TILLShops.org, Caleb adds, “We’re basically bringing the store to the social media platform.”

TILLshops.org is now open for business.

If you’re lucky enough to live near Hyde Park or Nashua, you are used to having access to gift items handcrafted by professional artisans and their apprentices, plus a corner café. This collective of unique entrepreneurial businesses – known as TILL Shops – includes ETC Gift Shop and Cafe, Cravings Cafe and Gift Shop and TILL Farms, representing an investment in TILL’s individuals, who work to acquire and refine valuable skills as trainees. The only limitation to TILL Shops has been geography—until now.

In March, TILLShops.org had a soft launch that will extend the artisan piece of its brick-and-mortar operation to virtually everyone (and everyone virtually) via Shopify. In addition to the handmade crafts using traditional mediums, TILL Shops will introduce its own tech-enabled products.

“We’ve been focusing on products that individuals will help to produce largely through 3-D printing,” explains Assistive Technology Specialist Caleb Garner. This technology enables production on-

choose your own adventure

France, Germany, the Azores, England, Denmark—for more than two decades, Education Through Travel (ETT) has arranged international excursions for TILL staff, individuals and external partners to experience the cultures, cuisines and landmarks of worldwide destinations.

March of 2026 began with a late-winter respite in Costa Rica, where high school students from the Riverview School in Sandwich, MA, a longtime ETT partner, were accompanied by chaperones from their school and our TILL travel experts. The 7-day trip included horseback riding in the Cloud Forest,

volcano viewing, Costa Rican cooking lessons and restorative beach trips.

In April, TILL staff and individuals will discover Northern Ireland’s treasures from the lush green pastures surrounding Belfast to the city center of Dublin, Ireland. Along with stops at the Guinness Storehouse, the birthplace of the Titanic, and Dublin Castle, ETT travelers will visit Inclusion Ireland! and MENCAP, two agencies that offer a window on the delivery of social services.

Employees who have worked with TILL for two years or more may apply to travel with ETT, as part of TILL’s innovative benefits package.





picture perfect

Count the smiles on this page. Whatever the season, whatever the reason, at every occasion, for every event, photos like these capture the joy and spirit of celebration throughout the TILL community.



