



Power of Together 2 SECT November 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Our first in-person meeting since February 2020 was held at the Mystic YMCA and was very well-attended. In addition, a Zoom opportunity was offered for those who didn't yet feel comfortable meeting in person, attended by about 8 members.

Barb Silver welcomed us all and reviewed the submission and voting processes. She announced that this was our 23rd meeting since the group started and that, to-date, we have raised \$223,100. She welcomed the 9 new members who had joined between the February 2020 meeting and the August 2021 meeting. (In addition, two members joined at this meeting, bringing our total membership up to 122.) Barb also passed out a listing of all our previous recipients and the donations they had received, starting from our first meeting in April of 2016. This information is also available on our website (www.poweroftogether.org).

Barb brought up a request from one of our members (Mary Fort Boyle) regarding the Little Free Library she donated to the Y. If anyone has a book or books - adult or children's - that they think someone else might enjoy, please consider bringing it to the Y and adding it to the Little Free Library cabinet located next to the sidewalk at the Y's front entrance.

Christopher Morren of Mystic Geriatrics Institute, our August 2021 recipient, was then introduced. The organization has received our largest contribution to date, \$12,200. Dr. Morren then gave a bit of background on the Institute. It was created 6 years ago with basically no budget but a vision of providing much-needed resources and information to the growing number of seniors in our community, as well as to the caregivers who work with them. He expressed his enormous thanks for our donation as it provides the funds necessary to develop a caregiver program that will be offered on two consecutive Saturdays this coming year, January 15 and January 22, 2022. The program will be offered at no cost to both caretakers and families, and will cover a number of topics essential to the welfare of our seniors: physical, emotional, financial and legal. Any and all are welcome to come. For more information, please go to their website: <https://www.mysticgeriatricsinstitute.com>.

The hat was then passed around and a number of members submitted their names. Of those submitted, three were randomly selected as follows:

1. **Community Speaks Out.** Joe de la Cruz, who founded the organization with his wife Tammy, in honor of their son Joey, presented. He spoke about their mission, how it was founded primarily on the concept of offering love, solace and advice to those with addictions and their families. He spoke of the rise of addictions during this trying period and invited any interested to their meetings at the Groton Public Library on the third Wednesday of every month. He reminded us of the monies we had donated in July of 2017 - those dollars allowed them to get much needed office space. They operate on very low overhead with an all-volunteer group. Any monies raised are primarily used for sober living housing and flights, if needed. They are also in the process of creating a play about addiction which will be offered to the public in the coming year. For more information about their program and their upcoming fundraiser in February, please go to their website: <https://www.communityspeaksout.org/>

2. **Immigration Advocacy and Support Center.** Betsy Stevenson introduced us to this vital organization (IASC) providing essential information about immigration law and policies. The Center is the only non-profit in Southeast Connecticut providing low-cost legal advice for local immigrants who cannot afford the prohibitively high cost of trying to get legal status in the U.S. They handle approximately 100 cases per year, 90% of which are successful, helping individuals and families stay together, get work visas, green cards, and live safely in their new country. That can be a monumental task in which IASC has played a pivotal role. For more information about this unique and important organization, please go to <https://www.iascct.org/>

3. **Operation Fresh Start Inc.** Shannon DePerry, who joined PoT2 just before the meeting and who founded the organization, presented this organization. Their primary goal is to "help children in the foster care system by offering them personal items, clothes, school supplies to bring to their new home." She spoke of how the idea of helping the foster care community began, starting with calls to neighbors and friends to provide luggage and toiletries to foster

children to replace the trash bags which were often the only way they could carry their belongings. The organization has expanded and is also working with adults who have aged out of the foster care system are in need of a "fresh start": single parents moving into a new home, a local family "in need of a boost," an individual who is facing difficult circumstances. Thus far, everything Operation Fresh Start has provided to those in need has been donated. In the future, Shannon is hoping to create a scholarship fund to give these young people the skills they need to succeed. Currently, they are in desperate need of a storage space to keep all the donations they have received. To learn more about the organization please go to their website: <https://www.operationfreshstartinc.com/about.html>.

Next Meeting. Our next meeting is scheduled for February 8, 2022. Hopefully we will be able to continue in-person meetings. In the meantime, we wish you all a very Happy Thanksgiving.

Our enormous thanks to all of you for your continued generosity and enthusiasm, despite all the challenges of this last year and a half. You have made a difference in the lives of so many. We have so much to be thankful for.