



**Power of Together 2 SECT
February 8, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Our first meeting of 2022 and the second in-person meeting since February 2020 was held at the Mystic YMCA and was well-attended. Two new members joined at the meeting. In addition, a Zoom opportunity was offered for those who didn't yet feel comfortable meeting in person, attended by about 13 members.

Dave Schulz welcomed us all and reviewed the submission and voting processes. Dave announced that we are trying to figure out a way for those on Zoom to offer a pitch. We will let you know if we come up with a strategy that will work. He also announced that the recipients who received their donation during our remote meetings in 2020-2021 are welcome to take a few minutes at future meetings to speak about how the donation was used (time permitting), if they let organizers know ahead of time.

Prior recipient **Phil Pavone** of **AZ Pawn Gift of Mobility** who received the donation at our last in-person meeting in February 2020 asked to speak and expressed his gratitude, along with his head mechanic, Steven Walkup. Since the PoT2 donation, the Gift of Mobility's giveaways have included 65 motorized wheelchairs, 23 motorized scooters, 42 wheelchairs, 2 stair lifts, 4 handicap ramps, and 2 handicap vans, one of which was for a family with 12-year-old with cerebral palsy. Phil's organization is unique in the US, and has been featured on CNN, the Today Show and other national outlets. Their recipients cover people of all ages with a wide range of disabilities. Their mechanics not only repair and donate items, but also go to nursing homes to repair equipment. Operating since 2014, the Gift of Mobility has given away almost 900 chairs and other items. According to Phil, "our work doesn't just change lives, it changes entire families."

Shannon DePerry, representing **Operation Fresh Start**, the organization awarded November's donation, spoke next and expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to take her organization to the next level because of Power of Together. They are donating 300 filled pieces of luggage to Main Street House, a homeless shelter for young people, and giving them gift cards to encourage healthy eating. They are developing a scholarship fund for youths living in the Thames River Family Program, a homeless shelter for single women with children, and are planning on rebuilding the playground there for the younger children. In addition, they are sponsoring several children attending summer camps in Stonington and Salem. Finally, PoT enabled Operation Fresh Start to "adopt" 75 children who received Christmas gifts last Christmas.

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

1. **Betsy Stevenson**, a volunteer and board member for **Immigration Advocacy and Support Center** explained that the center provides affordable quality legal support for immigrants. Betsy gave examples of the hardships immigrants face as they journey here and the challenges of negotiating the legal complications of settling in a new country. Many are unable to negotiate or afford these complicated processes and need attorneys. Their staff includes one attorney and two paralegals plus several volunteers. IASC has served over 300 people to date, and offers services on a sliding scale. They also provide community education presentations to help the community understand immigration law.
2. **Paul Geise** spoke in support of **New Heights**, a new Vista Life Innovations Program located in Pawcatuck, which serves families of children with disabilities. New Heights was just started in Fall 2021 and is a post-

secondary training/day services program for neurodiverse young adults ages 17 and above. The program focuses on teaching young adults with disabilities how to negotiate adulthood, and is designed to provide lifetime support. The building it is located in has been recently renovated for this program. The building can support 15-20 trainees at a time and includes 2 apartments upstairs as well as a meeting space. Paul spoke of how inspirational the families and young adults are who participate. This new program, including the costs for the building renovation, is in need of financial support.

3. **Kassy White**, a new PoT2 member, spoke of the importance of preserving a 224-acre parcel of land in northwest Stonington, located off Al Harvey Road. The town of Stonington, Avalonia Land Conservancy, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service are working with the Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit conservation organization, to secure the purchase. The land is rich in natural resources, biodiversity, and contains Copps Brook, a significant source of drinking water for the town. There is a deadline of February 22 to reach a partial funding goal; \$60,000 is needed to meet that goal. Tentatively, TPL and partners intend that Avalonia Land Conservancy will own 120 acres for open space, and USFWS will own 102 acres as part of the Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge. Trails traverse both properties, and both entities prioritize conservation and public access for residents and visitors alike.

The presenter who received the most votes was Betsy Stevenson, representing **Immigration Advocacy and Support Center**. Checks can be made to IASC; payment options will follow in an email along with these minutes.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Next Meeting: Our next meeting is scheduled for May 10, 2022.