

# THE COMPASSION CHRONICLES

THE TURN-A-FROWN AROUND (TAF) FOUNDATION, INC.

VOLUME 3: ISSUE 1

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**Joe Masciandaro, Treasurer and Host**

## *A Holiday Celebration*

By Caitlyn Yerves  
Director of Marketing

**December 20, 2014, Elizabeth, NJ** – For many years, TAF included people visiting lonely residents in scattered facilities, occasional shows and mental health exhibits that welcomed our mission, and diehard volunteers that were committed to ending loneliness. Recently, our management team has created more structure so that our efforts can continue and grow effectively. In December we had a holiday celebration to honor a year of hard work and dedication.

Joe Masciandaro hosted a lovely afternoon of fun, friendship, and an abundance of food fit for a family of twelve. It was very special to unite the TAF tribe together under such generous circumstances, and we had a jolly old time sharing memories, jokes, and stories from our individual journeys. It's funny how people with such different

backgrounds can come together with such a similar passion for making the world a better place.

We bonded over what inspires us about our mission and enthusiastically bounce around ideas for the future of TAF. This organization was founded in the name of fun, and it is so important that we keep that alive as we move forward and expand our reach to new horizons. Spending this time together allowed us to thaw out our ideas, melt away the ice, and begin to sizzle with excitement about what is to come.

It is a blessing to be a part of a group that is so authentic and grateful in living a life of service. We hope to see our team grow this year in size and in connectivity – and hopefully we can be a little sillier when the next get together comes around! As we praise the message of friendship, we must practice what we preach day in and day out. ●

## Compassion Comedy at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital



**Caitlyn Yerves**

By Caitlyn Yerves  
Director of Marketing

It was a pleasure to recreate the original essence of TAFE in November when our team was invited to Trenton Psychiatric Hospital. Joe Meany and I presented an interactive and motivational experience to a receptive and enthusiastic crowd of patients. It was inspiring for everybody in attendance.

The psychology department at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital (TPH) was responsible for arranging the wellness event for that month. Dr. Fischer, who is the head of that department, thought of Drew and wanted him to come to perform. An old friend of Drew's named Liz, who also works at TPH, reached out to us on Facebook. After following up we were able to make an arrangement to debut the first Compassion Comedy show with our new team.

The room filled up nicely, with somewhere between 50-70 patients present. The performance was also televised to other locations on site so that the patients that could not come out were able to watch. We utilized hula hoops as Smile Catchers to lighten the mood in the room and create an atmosphere of fun.

After introducing herself and singing a few songs, a few songs, Cool Cat led a practice of Laughing Yoga. That's probably something you need to experience to understand, but it had the room roaring with laughter. It was om-mazing to share that energy with everybody that was present.

Joe Meany opened up the mic to some of the people in the crowd, and it was so interesting to hear what everybody had to say – and the love with which they said it was incredibly moving. One of our friends from the day even came up and sang a few times. It was beautiful.

Of course, it wouldn't be a TAFE show without the Good Detector. The purpose of Compassion Comedy is to inspire the audience to love themselves and love each other. It felt like the message was received well, and there was a strong sense of hope in the auditorium as we all sang "Imagine" by John Lennon.

We are very excited to see where this newly opened door leads to for TAFE. It's a great new way for people to get involved with what we are doing – in an extraordinarily entertaining way. ●

## The New Website

### **Check our new website!**

**The highly anticipated TAFE website was launched at the end of December and truly portrays the mission of the organization. Volunteers can better navigate to resources and prospective volunteers can easily get started.**  
**[www.turnafrownaround.org](http://www.turnafrownaround.org)**

## *Caring Isn't Creepy*

By Jackie Dorey

Last year I overcame a fear common to many people from New Jersey: smiling at strangers. Living in this less than hospitable state my entire life, I had been conditioned to believe that acknowledging strangers was creepy and unnecessary. In high school, I shuffled through crowded hallways and lunch lines with my head down, dodging unnecessary eye contact. During my first year of college, I carried myself around campus in a similarly withdrawn manner, only noticing others if I was noticed first. Although I spent about twenty-five hours per week at Montclair State, I treated the environment as mostly a passing blur in my day.

Walking through the student center one day, a flyer advertising the MSU Smile Station's "Compassion Coffeehouse" caught my eye. Instead of heading home from another unremarkable day, I pushed myself to go. A few hours later I walked into Café Diem where there was a crowd gathered around a student reading their poetry. As I walked over, I was welcomed warmly. People smiled and gestured for me to sit down in an empty seat. Every performer was put at ease by the audience's encouraging presence. After several more performances the crowd began to disperse, and I was about to leave when one of the girls hosting the coffeehouse approached me. She smiled, gave me a hug, and thanked me for coming. Expecting to dip out of the café without a word, I was mildly shocked by her kindness.

After that night, I experimented with opening up in similar ways. While I didn't embrace everyone that crossed my path, I took smaller steps. Instead of fiddling with my phone as I passed someone on the sidewalk, I held my head up and smiled. To my surprise, they smiled back. At Dunkin Donuts, I made sure to sincerely thank the person who took my order. Appreciation showed in their eyes. I even started giving my mom more hugs.

Opening up in even the simplest ways was difficult at first. I didn't want to make anyone uncomfortable. That first reciprocated smile from a stranger was like flicking on a light switch. People were more comfortable around me rather than uncomfortable. Of course, everyone has different social boundaries that need to be respected. You shouldn't strike up a conversation with the person blasting their head phones next to you on the bus, or shout how much you like someone's dress from across the street. A gentle smile is all that's needed to make a connection, whether fleeting or lasting. ●



*Image by Google Images*

## *TAF& & Moving Forward CWC*

By Joe Meany

Director of the Mental Health Initiative

The new Moving Forward Community Wellness Center's (MFCWC) Smile Station, led by Smile Station Coordinator Andrew Dudas, visited the resident party at the nursing home and distributed over 60 holiday gifts to residents. The MFCWC has begun visiting the nursing home regularly. We are also very happy to have Doug Guscott as part of our MFCWC Smile Station who will be visiting the nursing home with Andrew and is our Music Activities Specialist. We have several interns and students who will be joining our efforts in Middlesex County. Thank you so much to our MFCWC Smile Station Members, Elena Kravitz the Moving Forward Community Wellness Center Manager, and all our supporters in Middlesex County. ●

## The New Health Trend

By Mehnaz Ladha

With the start of a new year, everyone vows to become healthier by joining gyms, hiring professional trainers, and signing up for expensive meal plans. But rather than spending hundreds of dollars, the easiest and most affordable health trend this year is smiling.

The human race's most powerful gesture has the ability to improve health. The contraction of facial muscles releases endorphins in the brain, reducing stress levels. As a result, the risk of developing stress related diseases like obesity and diabetes lowers significantly.

Endorphins, however, are not the only chemical released while smiling. The contraction of the facial muscles triggers the brain to release natural painkillers and serotonin. Forbes Magazine staff writer, Eric Savitz, explains that the act of smiling "stimulates our brain's reward mechanisms in a way that even chocolate, a well-regarded pleasure-inducer, cannot match." The combination of these chemicals is similar to those released while running, which produces a runner's high. Smiling makes it possible to experience this feeling without running.

Smiling also strengthens the immune system. The act of smiling results in the body producing white blood cells that help fight illnesses. A Hungarian study followed a group of hospitalized children who were entertained by storytellers and puppeteers. These children laughed and smiled much more, thereby their white blood cell counts were higher than the group of children who were not visited. Laughing also has the same health benefit as it too increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus increasing resistance to illness.

The power of a smile cannot be measured and the health benefits are endless. While it is easier to smile throughout the day than to find time to go to

the gym, incorporating physical activity into your daily routine is equally important and rewarding. Smiling is not just an indicator of happiness, but an essential tool for living healthy. ●

### Get Involved!

Contact us at [tafafoundation@gmail.com](mailto:tafafoundation@gmail.com)  
or call (862)682-9830.

Visit our website: [turnafrownaround.org](http://turnafrownaround.org)

Find us on Facebook: [TAFAS Foundation](https://www.facebook.com/TAFASFoundation)

Follow us on Twitter: [TAFAS Foundation](https://twitter.com/TAFASFoundation)

### The Smile Station Express

The Smile Station Express  
travels from town to town,  
setting up Smile Stations  
to turn your frown around.

Who will love the loveless?  
Who will be a friend?  
Who will seek and find the lost?  
Who will bring loneliness to an end?

Will it be the worship house?  
Love is what they teach.  
Or the local bar and grill?  
With beers within your reach.

Elk clubs, moose, and lions,  
any animal will do.  
Kids from grammar school to college,  
it could even be your friends and you.

So climb on the Smile Station Express  
as we gather each Forever Friend.  
Start a Smile Station right now,  
is the message that we send.

Just think about the lonely  
and how they will come alive.  
Just think about the forgotten  
whose soul you will revive.

So will you become a Forever Friend?  
Don't make us wait or guess.  
Please bring your unconditional love  
and join the Smile Station Express.