



2025 YEAR END APPEAL



December 2025

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“You meet saints everywhere. They can be anywhere. They are people behaving decently in an indecent society.”

—Kurt Vonnegut

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Please allow me to begin by wishing you all the best throughout the holiday season! I feel very fortunate to witness “people behaving decently” as Mr. Vonnegut would say. Their empathy is not as well publicized as acts of anger or outrage. They don’t make the news the way acts of greed or violence do. They aren’t covered with the same zeal as scandal and conspiracy theories. Acts of random kindness happen every day, from holding a door for someone or helping them carry groceries or making a donation to a worthy charity, or even listening to someone who needs to know that someone cares enough to listen. Caring about and caring for someone else may be the greatest act of decency we can perform, but people aren’t doing these things to be noticed. In fact, they almost always happen anonymously. If you’re lucky enough to witness a kindness, a personal sacrifice, a moment of compassion, hold on to it and treasure it, because **it can change your whole perspective.**

You may have heard this analogy. *I was walking with my full coffee cup when someone bumped into me. I was jostled and the coffee spilled all over.* Why did I spill the coffee? Most would say “because someone bumped you” or “you were jostled”. Reasonable answers but not correct. I spilled coffee because there was coffee in the cup. If it was tea then that would have spilled, and so on. The point is, we all get pushed, jostled and subjected to stress. How we respond to those situations depends a lot on what we have accumulated in our “cups”. Did we acquire negativity, selfishness, a persecution complex, entitlement, anger? Are those things filling up most of the space in our cups? Or did we also gather compassion, generosity, patience, mercy, kindness, love? Well, being human beings, we probably have a mixture of some of the good stuff and some of the bad. The trick is, **how do we change the concentration?**

I think that being involved with the Guild for Exceptional Children (GEC) brings out the best in people. I think it comes from the individuals we support. They can present unique challenges, yet their cups are full of mostly the good stuff (appreciation, enthusiasm, happiness, living in the moment). They genuinely appreciate their families, each other, and also the staff-and believe me, it’s contagious! It is impossible to work here and not be affected by their attitude. Speaking for myself, the people we support have undoubtedly helped me to become a better version of myself (and I’m still working on it!)

I would like to share a few quick stories about life at GEC:



Anton Moves in to His New Home

Anton R. is the newest resident of the storied Cassone ICF (Intermediate Care Facility) operated by GEC on Colonial Road since 1993. Anton's family was not considering residential placement initially. It wasn't on their radar until his father passed away 3 years ago following a terrible illness. According to Anton's Mom, Janice, "his father was his best friend in the world". Witnessing his father's decline and passing had a profound effect on Anton. Already diagnosed with I/DD (Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities) and Autism, he was becoming angry and depressed. At the urging of friends and family, Janice and Anton decided to give GEC a try. They were encouraged in that many of the staff at Cassone are bi-lingual (Spanish speaking). Anton took to his new home quickly, making new friends, enjoying numerous activities, and going on vacation to Cape May. His Mom says that he is now "happy, out of depression, and thrilled with GEC Cassone Residence!" The Guild for Exceptional Children runs 16 residential programs that operate 24/7, 365 days per year. We provide a home for people with I/DD who need one; each home offers a therapeutic environment, supervised medical care, training in important life skills, and so much more- all in a caring and supportive environment.

Top Left: Anton Pumpkin Picking with some Buddies

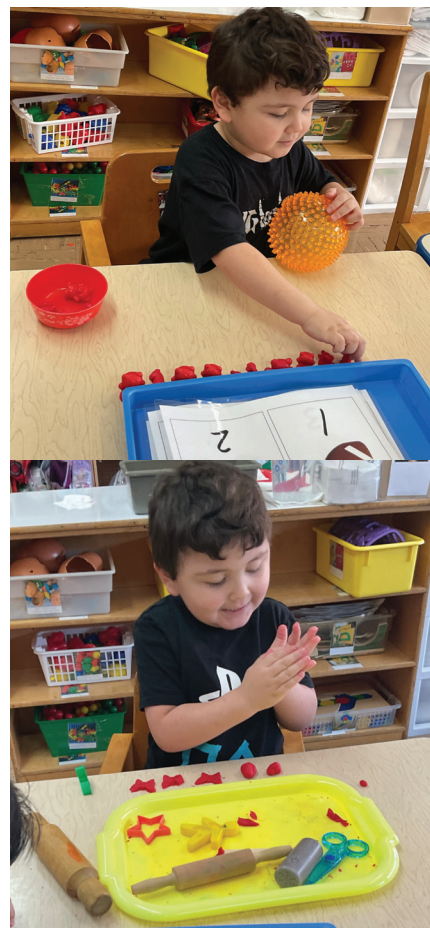
Bottom Left: Dressed up to party at GEC Fiesta

Dominic Finds His Voice and Advances His Skills at GEC Preschool

Dominic is a 4-year-old boy with a sweet smile. He enjoys playdough, playing with sand, and gym time. Last year, Dominic joined GEC's Preschool 2 classroom and worked on language, social, and cognitive skills with his teachers Miss Lili and Teaching Asistants Juana and Hala. In addition, Dominic received weekly sessions in speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. In June Dominic's preschool team met and discussed with his family his growth and progress. Dominic acquired so many new skills in language, play and cognition that he was able to move to a less restrictive classroom with more students. A new IEP (Individualized Education Plan) was developed to continue to work on increasing his language, social, and cognitive skills. Dominic's family is so happy that he continues to grow and thrive in school! GEC operates a year-round preschool for children with I/DD, aged 3-5 years old. The personal care they get at our preschool is beyond what they would receive in a regular Pre-K or 3K program, as they are provided with speech, occupational, and physical therapies consistent with their IEP's as well as classroom instruction and socialization. In the heart of Borough Park, the school serves many Chinese speaking and Spanish speaking families, so the majority of our staff is Bi-lingual.

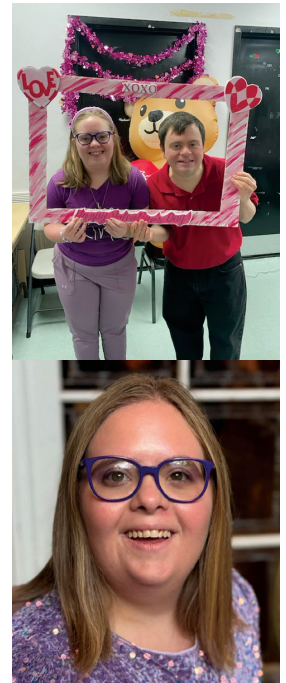
Top Right: Dominic working on speech with identification

Bottom Right: Fine motor activities with playdough



Jillian

When “Jilly” first enrolled in GEC’s Day Habilitation Without Walls Program (WOW), she was very guarded. She didn’t engage or socialize, and was extremely quiet and soft spoken. She needed a lot of reassurance and guidance. The GEC staff and individuals helped to support her through her first year...and boy did she bloom! She has since developed into a social butterfly and her confidence has soared! She now helps people who are new to the program. She has become a mentor to other new enrollees, showing them the ropes; reaching out when they first start and helping them to feel comfortable. She is always willing to try new things now and has excelled at each worksite. She has also found a love of kickboxing and beats the bags every Friday at the Max challenge with her WOW friends. Recently a staff said to her that she looks like a princess and she responded with “no I am a queen!” Her confidence has grown immensely due to the experiences that GEC has provided for her. Her mom, Samantha agrees: “I am so proud of Jillian and all that she accomplishes each day. She has blossomed and continues to flourish since joining the GEC. The staff and participants are all part of the personal and social growth our family and friends are seeing in Jillian – a testament that the GEC’s work is also being carried over at home! Thank you, GEC, for continuing to give Jillian the support and opportunity to enhance her quality of life. You all are simply the best!!!”



GEC serves about 200 families through Day Habilitation programs located throughout Brooklyn. Participants learn important life and social skills, and many volunteer at local worksites, giving them a feeling of accomplishment and building skills and confidence.

Top Right: Jillian celebrating Valentine's Day with a buddy

Bottom Right: Jillian smiling

GEC Recognizes Outstanding Staff Achievements

Going back to the start of this letter we spoke briefly about the “saints” we may encounter in our everyday world, behaving decently. Let me tell you that there is no shortage of these kind humans at GEC. From Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), to clinical staff to teachers and classroom staff, to supervisors & managers, to administration, kindness is what drives us. People who are mostly underpaid, doing heroic work; helping people to heal, and to grow, and to feel loved. Staff at GEC wear this like a banner of pride (or defiance against a society that does not prioritize the needs of the beautiful people we support). Like other organizations that do this kind of altruistic work, we are facing a great deal of uncertainty recently, as talk of funding cuts to Medicaid persist. Because we are dependent on government funding for our rates, we have been raising funds to make the lives of our workforce just a little bit easier. We want them to know that we have their back, and that people believe in their work. We have recently developed a tuition assistance program for staff continuing their education and a monthly staff recognition event, that awards staff for outstanding achievements. Here are a few of the wonderful staff we have recently recognized.

Below, Left to Right: Eben Rivera, Christine Foley, Grania Finnegan, Riccardo Hamilton, Garnett Brown, Monique Boxille and Danielle Lahmani



Why Support GEC?

In case you are wondering why it's important to support organizations like GEC or whether funds raised will be put to good use, let me share a few important stats. GEC has a 4-Star rating (the highest) with Charity Navigator. 91% of all revenue goes directly to improving the lives of the people we support (against Charity Navigator's Benchmark of 75%). 90% of staff feel a sense of personal satisfaction for the work they do at GEC but 57% feel that the compensation does not align with their responsibilities. I have already mentioned that reliance on government funding makes us uneasy. Your support is so important! If you can't donate now, you may consider including GEC as part of a will, trust, or as a life insurance beneficiary, or exercise a monthly giving option. For 67 years we have built quite a reputation for excellence and care, and we all hope this legacy will continue!

A Final Word

I ran into the mother of a young man who recently joined our adult day program. She couldn't say enough about how happy he was because GEC is "just like a family". That was music to my ears! As I am writing this, I also found out that one of our long-term residents passed away this morning. Mildred, who would have turned 100 this January, passed in her sleep in her home in the comfort and company of staff & family who loved her. When I spoke with her niece and guardian and told her how sorry I am, her response was "I'm not! She lived a good, long and happy life thanks to you guys"! It put me in mind of others we had lost this year...Robert, Elvira, Bunny, and the list goes on. One thing they had in common, GEC helped them to live fulfilling and happy lives, and they taught us so much in the process. And isn't it wonderful when the people we are trying to help actually help us to find our better angels?

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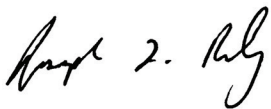
"Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much."

—Helen Keller (Courtesy of Jillian's mom, Samantha)

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I wish you every happiness throughout the holiday season and always!

Gratefully Yours,



Joe Riley
GEC CEO





2025 YEAR END APPEAL

Donation Reply Form

____ Yes, I would like to support the GEC's Year End Appeal with my enclosed tax-deductible gift of:
____ \$25 ____ \$75 ____ \$150 ____ \$200 ____ other

This is a ☐ One time donation ☐ Recurring donation ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Yearly

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____

My gift is in Honor of _____ or in Memory of _____

Please make your check payable to the GEC.

Credit Card Payment:

Preferred Method of Payment: _____ Visa _____ Mastercard _____ Discover _____ AmEx

Name as it appears on card: _____

Card No. _____ Exp. Date: _____ 3 or 4 digit code: _____

Zip Code: _____ Amount: \$ _____ Signature: _____

Other Giving Opportunities

Securities, Trusts and Real Estate

Donations in the form of: stocks, bonds, mutual funds, securities or real estate can offer the contributor a substantial tax benefit. Please consult with your tax advisor for current IRS rules and regulations.

Planned Giving

Planned gifts such as: gift annuities, deferred payment annuities and remainder annuity trust can offer the donor numerous tax benefits. The Development Department can provide information that would allow you and your tax consultant to choose a plan that meets your financial needs.

Wills & Bequests

The most important reason to have a will is to ensure that you are the one who decides how your estate will be divided. By remembering the GEC in your will, you will help perpetuate a legacy of care that has existed since 1958. If you already have a will, a codicil can be added. Please consult with your attorney.

Matching Gifts

To double or perhaps triple your donation, please inquire if your employer has a matching gift program. Please include the matching gift form with your donation. The Development Department will complete the form and return it to your employer for processing.

Questions? Please contact the Development Department at **718-833-6633 x 228 / 229** or **cmansuetto@gecbklyn.org**.