

# Open Sky

COMMUNITY SERVICES

# 50

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FIFTY YEARS:

A Legacy of Leadership and Commitment to the Community

As founding Board member Retired Judge John McCann recounts in his history of The Bridge, a group of concerned citizens came together in the early 1970's as the Human Rights Committee in Westborough, Massachusetts. Their goal was to champion people who were discriminated against or otherwise marginalized by society. At the same time, the Lyman School for Boys was closing, leaving few options for the youth in their care.

The Human Rights Commission spent several years planning and overcoming objections to establish a "halfway house" program for boys at Grove Street in Westborough. From this humble, yet inspiring start, The Bridge was born in 1973, with one program and an annual budget of \$80,000.

Only three short years later, Sharon Rinkus and Dennis Rice would found Alternatives Unlimited in Whitinsville to provide services and supports for people with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health challenges.

The 1970's proved to be the start of community and home-based services, as society moved away from institutions in order to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to live full, rich and inclusive lives in the community.

What a legacy.

Those histories converged in 2018 when The Bridge and Alternatives affiliated to become "Open Sky Community Services, Inc." Today, Open Sky has 1,300 employees, more than 100 programs throughout Central MA and a budget of \$118 million. But our mission has not really changed.



Ken Bates,  
President and  
CEO

David Przesiek,  
Chair of the Board

We are still helping people find their open sky through relationships, wellness and opportunities. We are still a "Bridge" to the community and the "Alternatives" are still unlimited. The sky is the limit!

As the President/CEO and Chair of the Board of Open Sky Community Services, Inc., we are proud to share this look at the history, legacy of leadership and commitment to community that spans five decades. Fifty years of serving, growing, and evolving.

We would not be here without the dedication of long-standing Board members, corporators, donors, friends, community partners and staff, who make magic happen every day for the benefit of individuals and families we serve. Thank you. We look forward to partnering with you for the next half-century and beyond.

Ken Bates, President and CEO  
David Przesiek, Chair of the Board

*"Open Sky has helped me with increasing my independence to achieve the goals I have set for myself both personally and professionally. They are my cheerleader and shoulder to cry on whenever I need them no matter how big or small the problem is."*

Sofia C.

*"Open Sky has helped me with managing my medications, grocery shopping, taking me to appointments, and making sure my bills are paid."*

*"It has helped me gain self confidence."*

Mike C.

*"Open Sky Services are unique because they help us work on what matters to us."*

Marc C.

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Open Sky serves more than 5,000 individuals each year in 100 programs throughout Central Massachusetts. Our programs include drop-in services, outreach programs, in-home care, family support, group living environments, professional trainings and more.

- Behavioral Health Services for Adults and Young Adults
- Mental Health Services for Children, Adolescents and Families
- Substance Use Disorder Services
- Co-Occurring Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services
- Acquired Brain Injury Services
- Autism Support Services
- Services for Individuals and with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- Housing and Homeless Assistance
- Supports for LGBTQIA+ Youth
- Employment and Education Services and Supports
- Behavioral Health, Navigation and After Incarceration Services for Justice-Involved
- Evidence-Based Practice Training and Consultation
- Care Coordination and Care Management
- Crisis Intervention Training and Technical Assistance Center (CIT-TTAC) for police and first responders

The affiliation of The Bridge of Central Massachusetts and Alternatives Unlimited in 2018 resulted in the creation of Open Sky Community Services, a health and human services agency that brings more than 50 years of experience serving children, adults, and families with Behavioral Health Challenges, Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities, Autism, Brain Injury, Homelessness, and other complex challenges.

Open Sky is dedicated to the belief that every individual, no matter what challenges or life experience they have, deserves the chance to live a productive and meaningful life. With that goal in mind, we put innovative, evidence-based practices – delivered by highly-trained and compassionate staff – to work in residential programs and community settings across Central Massachusetts every day.

We support individuals and families to achieve their own definition of wellness, develop meaningful relationships, have access to opportunities of their choosing and be valued members of society. We know that with the right skills, services and supports, every person we serve can see beyond their perceived limitations and live beyond their own



expectations. Open Sky was built on a foundation of strong community relationships and all our efforts are informed by our commitment to the values of inclusion, opportunity, diversity, racial equity, and justice for ALL people in our community. We help people who feel a door is closed to find their open sky.

As we celebrate 50 years since the opening of the first program run by The Bridge in 1973, we want to look back at our incredible history and share it with the community who helped us get to where we are today. We also want to look to the future to celebrate the strength of Open Sky and all that is to come.

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

*“Blending best practices with the power of community, we partner with individuals and families to see beyond and live beyond perceived limitations to pursue fulfilling lives!”*

**RACE EQUITY STATEMENT:**

*“Open Sky Community Services is committed to becoming anti-racist, celebrating diversity and creating an environment that provides a safe, inclusive and equitable space for all by fostering growth and healing. We will create, promote and uphold policies, practices, attitudes and actions that create unbiased power and access to opportunities for our community.”*



Committee Advancing Racial Equity (CARE) Team members at the agency's health fair in 2022



Open Sky staff at a team picnic

*“At Open Sky, our unwavering commitment is to create an organization that genuinely embraces and cherishes everyone, fostering an inclusive environment where both our dedicated employees and the people we serve find a deep sense of worthiness and belonging, regardless of their unique identities.”*

Stephen Osei Bonsu  
Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

**The Open Sky Approach**

**Relationships**

We are committed to people connecting with others in meaningful and mutually supportive ways. We help people nurture and develop relationships that support their vision of a fulfilling life.



**Opportunities**

We are committed to people doing more of what they want to do. We help people to connect or reconnect with the opportunities they find meaningful and satisfying. The sky is the limit!



**Wellness**

We are committed to people feeling their best. We support people in pursuing their own vision of wellness.



*Fulfilling Life*



## Blue skies ahead.

This community means everything, and Open Sky has put in the work to help it thrive for over 50 years.

Webster Five is proud to support this milestone and those yet to come.



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## A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

#### The Bridge of Central Massachusetts, Inc.

Daniel Hanrahan	1973-1980
Karl Krantz	1980-1984
Barbara Brown	1984-1988
Stephen Murphy	1988-1990
Daniel Hanrahan	1990-1996
Barent Walsh (CTC, 1973-1996)	1996-2015
Ken Bates (President/CEO)	2015 – present

#### Alternatives Unlimited, Inc.

Sharon Rinkus	1976-1979
Dennis Rice	1979-2018



## THROUGH THE YEARS

### The Bridge of Central Massachusetts

- **1971** Westborough Human Rights Council submits proposal to Dept. of Youth Services to establish "halfway house" for boys upon closure of Lyman School.

- **1973** This first program, called The Bridge, opens on Grove St. in Westborough (Agency budget: \$80,000 a year).



- **1973** Community Treatment Complex (CTC) founded by Barry Walsh, Phd and others starts the first after school program at Worcester State Hospital.



- **1981** CTC establishes Adolescent Day School at 340 Main Street, Worcester.
- **1982** Northboro Community Residence (NCR) opened as first Mental Health program of the Bridge.
- **1982** CTC establishes a DMH-funded Adult Graduate Service.
- **1983** Community Treatment Complex (CTC) opens the Ives Program for 8 adolescents with mental illness.
- **1984** The Bridge opens services in Southbridge, Webster and Dudley.
- **1986** The Bridge expands services for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD).
- **1988** The Bridge Childrens' Residence for six male youth ages 8 to 12 opens on Charles St. in Westborough.

### Alternatives Unlimited, Inc.

#### 1970s



- **1976** Sharon Rinkus and Dennis Rice found Alternatives Unlimited with an agency budget of \$300,000, supporting three programs.
- **1977** Alternatives purchases Spinning Ring Mill in Whitinsville and opens Sheltered Workshop serving 200 individuals.
- **1979** Dennis Rice becomes Executive Director of Alternatives.

#### 1980s

- **1980** Alternatives affiliates with Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation and is one of three nationwide implementing psychiatric rehabilitation approach.
- **1985** Alternatives holds first "Bike-A-Thon," which later becomes known as the Valley Friendship Tour.
- **1986** Alternatives expands day and residential services in the South Norfolk area.
- **1986** Total budget is \$4.5 million, with 18 programs and 135 employees.
- **1989** Alternatives joins the International Work Exchange program, hiring 8 employees from the UK.



## Celebrating OPEN SKY



• ANNIVERSARY •

Open Sky Community Services has been helping people see beyond and live beyond perceived limitations for five decades and counting.

We are happy to support their mission and recognize this special and amazing milestone.



WORKERS' COMPENSATION FOR NEW ENGLAND | [ksnyder@aimmutual.com](mailto:ksnyder@aimmutual.com) | [aimmutual.com](http://aimmutual.com)



## The Bridge of Central Massachusetts

- **1990** The Bridge's Vernon Street Boys Home opens in Worcester.
- **1991** The Bridge's Supportive Housing services begin in Southbridge.
- **1991** CTC renames high school for special needs "The G. Stanley Hall School" and opens the School House program for children ages 8 to 12.
- **1995** A new home sharing program "Shared Living" is initiated at The Bridge.
- **1996** The Bridge and CTC merge to form The Bridge of Central Massachusetts, Inc.
- **1998** The Safe Homes program for LGBTQIA+ youth is established in Worcester.
- **1999** The Bridge of Central MA is awarded a contract from HUD to provide services for homeless individuals and families in the South County area (SCHAP).

## 1990s

- **2001** The Safe Homes program merges with The Bridge.
- **2001** The Bridge receives national accreditation from the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services.
- **2001** The Bridge implements state of the art clinical innovations including Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Project Adventure and specialized Dual Diagnosis treatments..
- **2003** Following a successful capital campaign led by J. Christopher Collins and Meredith Wesby, a factory building on Mann Street is renovated to become the new headquarters for The Bridge and the new home for the G. Stanley Hall School.
- **2006** Buildings named in honor of longtime Bridge trustees – the J. Christopher Collins building at 4 Mann St and the Holt House in honor of Nita Holt.
- **2007** The Saunders Street program serving four brain injured women opens in Gardner.
- **2009** The Bridge opens the Bridge Training Institute.
- **2009** The Bridge in collaboration with Alternatives Unlimited is awarded contracts for five new programs in north county by DMH.
- **2010** Supported Employment program to help individuals find and keep jobs implemented by The Bridge.

## 2000s

## Alternatives Unlimited, Inc.

- **1991** Alternatives Unlimited creates two seats on their Board of Directors for individuals served.
- **1992** Alternatives Unlimited Supported Living program receives Dept. of Mental Health Quality Award.
- **1995** Alternatives offers "Shared Living" for the first time.
- **1996** Alternative acquires the North County residential network through DMH, adding \$1.9 million in new funding. Total budget is \$10 million with 280 employees.



- **2000** Alternatives Unlimited embraces a community engagement paradigm shift to maximize real community membership – real homes, real jobs and real relationships.
- **2000** Alternatives acquires a Worcester residential network through DMH.
- **2000** Boston Globe lists Alternatives among the top 100 non-profits in Massachusetts.
- **2001** Alternatives closes the sheltered workshop in Whitinsville and shifts to store-front career centers.
- **2003** Board votes to renovate the Whitin Mill into a multi-purpose, inclusive, community treasure for the region to enjoy.
- **2008** ValleyCAST (Blackstone Valley Culture, Arts and Sciences Together) is incorporated by Alternatives Unlimited.
- **2008** Alternatives Unlimited renovates Whitin Mill, after completing successful \$4m capital campaign.



## The Bridge of Central Massachusetts

- **2012** The Bridge opens program in Hyde Park to serve individuals with I/DD and continues to focus on evidence-based practices throughout its services.
- **2015** Barry Walsh, PhD retires as Executive Director of The Bridge and Ken Bates becomes President and CEO.
- **2016** Open Sky becomes a licensed outpatient clinic serving individuals with Medicaid, Medicare and other insurances.



## 2010-2018

## Alternatives Unlimited, Inc.

- **2010** Alternatives Unlimited is awarded new contracts by DMH and assumes the operation of North Central Human Services, Inc. in Gardner. The Bridge and Alternatives collaborate on five north county programs.
- **2011** First "Club 21" launched in Worcester – a social club matching 10 individuals served with 10 community volunteers.
- **2012** Adult Family Care program grows to 75 individuals and their families.
- **2016** Alternatives ends its 40th year with 700 staff and budget of \$45 million.
- **2018** Affiliation becomes official on July 1, 2018.



## 2018

- **2018** Alternatives Unlimited and The Bridge of Central Massachusetts affiliate on July 1, 2018.

## The Beginning of Open Sky Community Services

- **2018** Dennis Rice retires as Executive Director of Alternatives Unlimited, and Ken Bates becomes President and CEO of the merged entity.
- **2018** Together the two agencies become Open Sky Community Services, Inc., representing the idea of limitless possibilities for people who face a myriad of challenges.
- **2018** Open Sky forms Central Community Health Partnership (CCHP) and participates in the MassHealth Accountable Care Organization (ACO) Pilot.
- **2018** Open Sky is awarded our first SAMHSA grant and becomes a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC).



- **2018** Open Sky collaborates with MassHealth to pilot Behavioral Health for Justice Involved (BHJI).
- **2018** Open Sky opens our first DPH / BSAS funded program – Co-Occurring Enhanced Residential Program in Douglas. Open Sky expands homeless services and services for justice-involved.
- **2022** The agency is awarded a contract from DMH for Tradewinds Club House in Southbridge and from DDS for the Family Support Center of Blackstone Valley.
- **2023** Open Sky collaborates with Seven Hills Foundation and other partners to form new Career Pipeline programs for immigrants and refugees and BIPOC staff, receiving \$6 million in grant funding over three years.
- **2023** Today, Open Sky has 1,300 employees in more than 100 programs throughout Central Mass with a budget of \$118 million.





One of Open Sky's newest locations, 288 Grove St., is home to the Rapid Response HUB and Bridge Counseling Center among other programs.

Megan served by Open Sky's Crystal House Clubhouse accesses career development and job training at the Clubhouse.

Natalie and Bradley, two individuals served by Open Sky's Family Support Center, at a group outing.

Nahani Meuse, Father Landry, and Maydee Morales at the Seeds of Hope Shelter at Blessed Sacrament Church in Worcester.

## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES:

# A few highlights of our programs and services

### ■ Rapid Response HUB

The Rapid Response HUB provides services to children and adults, specifically the Latinx population; LGBTQIA+; veterans; justice-involved; people experiencing homelessness; adults with serious mental health needs; children and youth with serious emotional disorders; people with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

The Rapid Response HUB, in collaboration with community partners, such as the Edward M. Kennedy Health Center, Family Health Center, and YOU, Inc., will serve more than 3,300 individuals and families with known and chronic conditions as well as those who have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In alignment with Worcester's Community Health Improvement Plan, Open Sky expanded its Rapid Response HUB and community-based services to offer urgent and timely access to behavioral health services.

This HUB consolidates numerous office and clinical spaces and converts an existing mixed-use commercial facility at 288 Grove Street, Worcester, MA, into an efficient one-stop-shop to help individuals access care, address health disparities, and improve community health outcomes through more responsive service delivery.

*"The RRH is having a positive impact in the community by providing community members quicker support than many other options in the community that may have long waiting lists and assistance in navigating a complex behavioral health system."*

Ryan Johnston, Vice President of Programmatic Risk

### ■ Employment

Open Sky believes that meaningful employment is a critical part of a

*"We go above and beyond to meet people's needs: interview prep, help people get to interviews, find transportation options, connect them with helpful resources. By connecting with employers we help them be more disability friendly, which can trickle down and benefit others who apply in the future. Changing perspectives for employers is about what is possible and what they can offer in the workplace, expanding their ideas about what the ideal worker looks like."*

Amelia Dillon, Director of Career Services

successful life. The organization also believes that all individuals, regardless of ability, should strive toward employment that matches their skills, job readiness, and preferences. The organization currently supports more than 125 people each year in their present jobs.

### ■ Family Support Center

Opened in February 2021, the Open Sky Support Center, a program of Open Sky Community Services and funded by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS),

*"With a visible presence, our families served are integrated throughout the communities of the Blackstone Valley. We build partnerships and strengthen awareness with organizations by providing inclusive recreational supports, financial and day-to-day practical assistance to assist families navigate the waters of everyday life."*

Donna Macleod-Prior, Developmental Disabilities Service Director

supports children and adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities and Autism who live with their families in several Central Massachusetts towns.

By tailoring our services to your family's needs, we can help you and your entire family navigate available services and supports, including the educational system; connect with community resources; provide trainings; offer consultations, mentoring and networking opportunities; and build relationships at home and in the community that adhere to your culture, values and preferences.

### ■ Homelessness

Open Sky's Homeless Services have earned a strong reputation for excellence based on 30 years' experience. We use evidence-based practices, including Housing First, Motivational Interviewing, Recovery Oriented Cognitive Therapy (CT-R), and Harm Reduction, resulting in strong measured outcomes.

The goal of our Homeless Services is to provide wraparound services and supports to ensure lasting stability. In addition to rapid response time, we maintain connections for as long as needed. Our collaborations with

community partners, landlords, and other housing providers as well as the Continuum of Care task force aim to help individuals overcome barriers to living fulfilling lives.

Our services and supports include rapid rehousing; housing stabilization; rental assistance; community support programs; support for people who are justice-involved; case management and connections to care; recovery navigation and coaching; and behavioral health support.

*"Our services are designed to work together to form a continuum of care for individuals and families. We are able to quickly assess people's situation and support them in finding the services and supports that they are eligible for and that best meet their needs. We use both housing first principles and a harm reduction approach to meet people where they are."*

Amy Arrell, Service Director for Community Services





Sondrea Surette-Narcisse, Operations Director of the CIT-TTAC program, along with Paul Cyr and Angel Rivera from Worcester PD at the program's Presenter Appreciation Dinner in 2022.



Graduating class of a CIT Dispatch Training including staff from the Worcester Emergency Communications Center.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Open Sky collaborates with various community resources to enable individuals to participate in classes, clubs, centers and experience arts and cultural opportunities. Individuals we serve participate in creative workshops, the Furniture A.R.T. Recovery Program, set design, performing arts initiatives, a pen pal program with the Worcester Bravehearts, and others.

ValleyCAST, the arts and culture arm of Open Sky, provides inclusive arts and music activities that people of all ages and abilities can enjoy together. Throughout the year, ValleyCAST hosts theater productions, community concerts, professional and amateur art exhibits and more. These events are designed to bring individuals served in our programs together with the community in an inclusive way.

The free summer concert series takes place on the Dennis H. Rice Community Plaza in Whitinsville and features local musicians whose music ranges from country to orchestral.



*“At Open Sky and ValleyCAST we intentionally partner with individuals and organizations in the community to create opportunities for the people we serve to engage in events, activities, etc. Participation side by side in events, activities, classes with other community members can offer a sense of purpose for individuals, it is more normalizing than a Human Service organization creating events, etc... in silos vs naturally in the community. This unique approach serves to break down the stigma which may exist, helping community members see that people who are “different” than they are, and perhaps facing complex challenges, have gifts and talents to offer and are able to appreciate and enjoy events and activities like themselves.”*

Kelley Gamble  
Vice President of Community Engagement

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



In keeping with its mission to blend best practices with the power of community, Open Sky offers training and technical assistance to law enforcement through the Central Massachusetts **Crisis Intervention Team - Training and Technical Assistance Center (CIT-TTAC)**. Law enforcement and first-responders are eligible to receive this training, which includes policy and procedure development, case consultations, resources connections and more. This program has been proven to positively impact those who have frequent contact with law enforcement and at-risk individuals by reducing potentially traumatic interactions and finding treatment rather than placing them in the criminal justice system.



**The Bridge Training Institute** offers continuing education workshops and personalized consultation services that focus on evidence-based and best practice treatment models for those in the behavioral health field. Our training and consultation services are tailored to meet the needs of schools, human service professionals and licensed clinicians.

*“Since we have established the CIT-TTAC program in Central Massachusetts, we have seen an increase in jail and hospital diversion for individuals experiencing mental health crises. First responders are reporting that they are more comfortable with responding to mental health calls and providing resources to the individual/family for additional support. The CIT-TTAC program provides tools and resources to first responders from experts in the mental health field to divert individuals from jail and unnecessary hospitalizations.”*

Taylor Lacroix  
Senior Division Director  
of Community Services



## CAREER PIPELINE

*“The Career Pipeline seeks to provide exploration of human services careers to people that may not have had the opportunity previously or considered a career in human services. That exploration paired with the experience gained in the program sets the foundation for the beginning and continuation of a meaningful and rewarding career. Without this program the current staffing crisis would be far worse than it is. This program creates the needed resources and pipelines to support and extend opportunities to enable people to join our teams and contribute as staff members to our programs.”*

Lisa Jeronymo  
Vice President of Human Resources

Since 2019, Open Sky has collaborated with partners to address workforce shortages and equity in the field of Behavioral Health/Human Services.

The Task Force has developed four primary initiatives, focused on supporting BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) who are considering or beginning a career in human services, or for those seeking career development.

**Dynamic Futures**, a Pathway Program for high school students, introduces BIPOC youth to the human services field. Dynamic Futures is operated by UMass Chan Medical School and the City of Worcester in partnership with others.



*“The Career Pathway program offers supports for immigrants and refugees to enter the human services field, for BIPOC staff to explore and achieve career and educational advancement, and for current employees to embark on an LMHC Master’s degree, helping to address shortages of clinicians. Navigators and wraparound supports are key elements of this work.”*

Lorie Martiska – Vice President of Advancement



**The Human Services Career Support Program** introduces and supports immigrants and refugees who are entering the field. It includes paid training, hands-on experience through job rotations, and wraparound supports. Career support navigators and mentors facilitate the process.

**The Clinical and Leadership Pathway** helps incumbent BIPOC staff develop career plans based on defined pathways and provides career path options, training and support, mentors/ navigators, and wraparound supports.

**The Higher Education Clinical Pathway** prepares incumbent staff for enrollment in a three-year Master’s in Counseling Program at Framingham State University.



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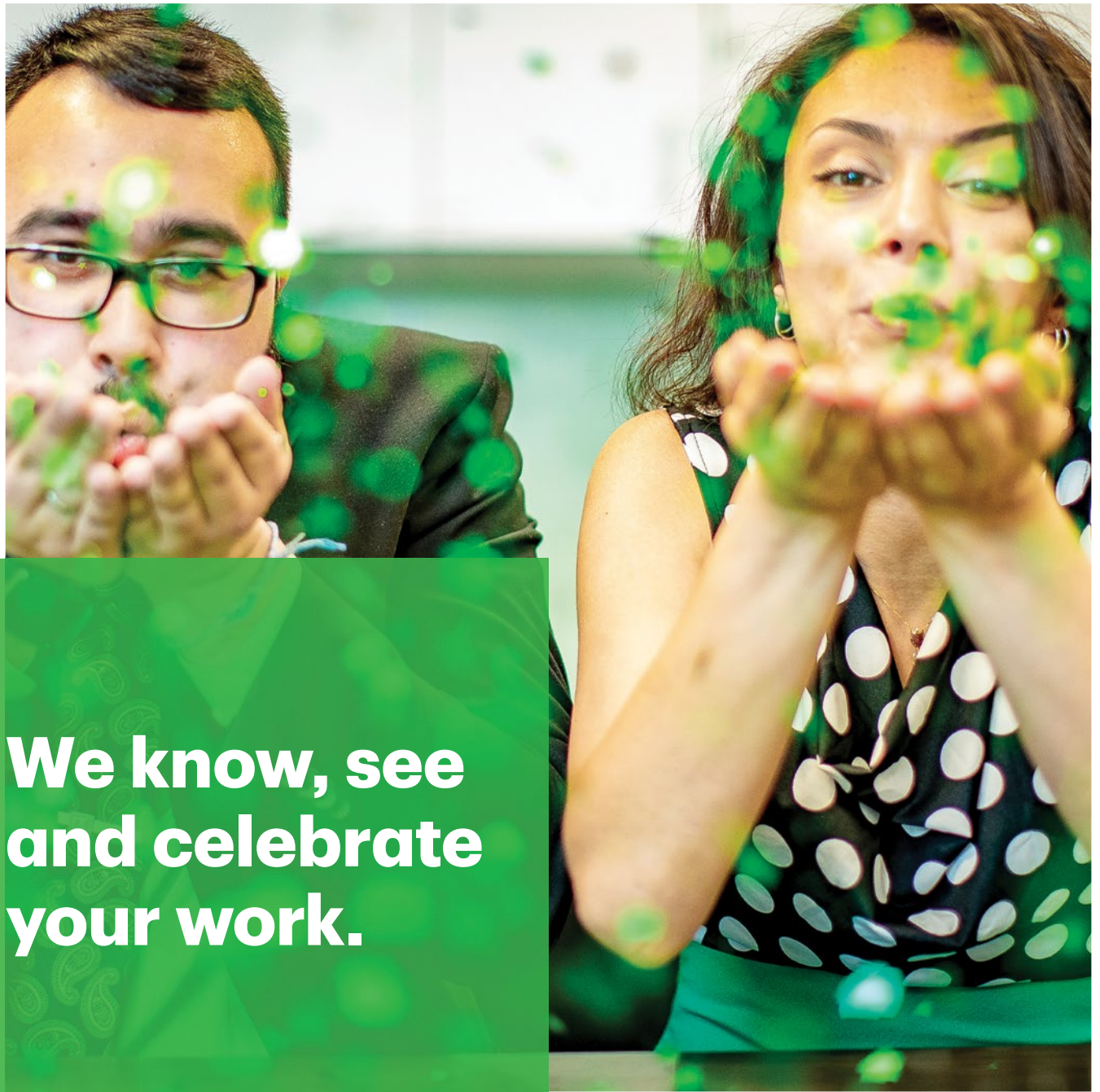
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**We know, see  
and celebrate  
your work.**

Thank you Open Sky Community Services.  
Your mission to deliver continuous positive  
impact in the community is an inspiration.  
Cheers to 50 years and to many more.

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