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YOUR LASTING IMPACT

For many philanthropists, making sure every charitable gift counts can be challenging. Enter the Long Island Community Foundation (LICF), a division of The New York Community Trust that connects donors with vetted nonprofits committed to addressing existing issues on Long Island. In identifying Youth Development as a major area of need, LICF and its donor base are broadening the horizons of at-risk youth in the PROSPER program at The Viscardi Center.

LICF’s funding of PROSPER (People Reaching for Opportunities to Succeed) allows Lincoln Tech and the Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County — teach life skills that can’t be taught in the classroom, and have been found to decrease student dropout rates. 98 percent of those who complete the program graduate high school to attend college and secure employment.

“LICF’s staff and donors understand that not everyone can thrive in traditional school settings,” said Executive Director Dave Okorn. “The PROSPER program aligns with our goal to advance the well-being and economic self-sufficiency of at-risk youth by providing opportunities for positive youth development and leadership.”

According to Okorn, the goal is to promote opportunity for all to become contributing and productive members of society. With LICF’s guidance and support, it’s a win-win for donors and PROSPER certificate holders alike, who can both opt to leave a lasting impact on the community.
Meet Dayna
The Second Chance That Changed Everything

Right now, 2012 Henry Viscardi School (HVS) alumna Dayna Stropkay is exactly where she wants to be. With an Associate’s degree from Queensborough Community College under her belt and a new year at St. John’s University just beginning, she’s more determined than ever to complete her undergraduate studies, before moving on to a master’s program in education.

“It’s because of the caring teachers and staff at HVS that I would like to pursue a career in education like my sister,” Dayna said. “I know I’ll be in a hard road because I’m non-verbal, but nothing has ever stopped me before from trying to reach my dreams.”

Several years ago, however, Dayna and her family feared she was approaching a dead end. As a teenager who uses a wheelchair, she felt more like a spectator than a participant at the public high school she attended. She wasn’t passing exams, and because her large public school wasn’t prepared to accommodate a student with a severe physical disability, it was made clear that fulfilling requirements for a local diploma wouldn’t be possible.

Dayna never doubted herself, but even she was surprised by her academic prowess when she enrolled at HVS junior year. She flourished in the fully-accessible learning environment, acing tests, competing on the wheelchair basketball team, and assisting the school hearing specialist during free periods. Dayna also experienced the freedom of traveling the halls and meeting friends in the cafeteria without an aide in tow at all times.

For the first time, Dayna believed her abilities preceded her disabilities, and gaining a higher degree of autonomy elevated her confidence to succeed.

“HVS taught me to be independent not only in my movements, but in my thinking,” she said. “I learned to advocate for myself, and learned what worked and what didn’t work for me.”

Before graduating high school and moving on to frequent the dean’s list in college, Dayna developed a gig for teaching a volunteer in an elementary school classroom at Viscardi. Today she aims to use her personal experiences to encourage inclusion and accessibility in schools, so more students with disabilities have a chance to finally find their own voice.

Meet Dayna and other Viscardi alumni at ViscardiCenter.org/Stories.

Joe N. Savasta: Golfing for a Difference

When September rolls around, two things can be expected at Viscardi: its annual Golf Outing will once again be held in benefit of employment and youth transition programs and services for people with disabilities, and Joe N. Savasta will once again hit the greens in support of the cause.

For over four years, Savasta — President and CEO of J.N. Savasta Corp. and CEO of Broadreach Medical Resources, Inc. — has been a leading backer of the fall fundraiser, which enhances vital vocational training, job placement, and school-to-work services for thousands of adolescents and adults with visible and non-visible disabilities annually. He was named the Golf Honoree in 2015, and through his two businesses, is the presenting sponsor of this year’s event.

“A passion for bettering the lives of young people with disabilities urged him to get in the game, but something clicked for Savasta after meeting the children and adults directly affected by his generosity.”

In what he describes as a “whirlwind,” Savasta dedicated himself to one of the Center’s board of directors in early 2017, where he plays an instrumental role in shaping future initiatives. He additionally champions two other Viscardi fundraisers — Celebrity Sports Night and the Whiskey Flight.

Savasta now aims to encourage other community members to visit the campus. Because when it comes to philanthropy, Savasta says seeing is believing.

“You have to care about whatever it is you’re doing. It feels good to be able to give back and know exactly who you’re helping and how you’re making a difference. As a supporter, that’s what makes you want to stick around.”

The Golf Outing, presented by J.N. Savasta Corp./Broadreach Medical Resources, Inc., will be off at Glen Head Country Club on September 18. The day features a round of golf, a cocktail reception and elaborate dinner buffet, on-course contests and enhancements, and a silent auction.

For more information about the Golf Outing, visit ViscardiCenter.org/golf.
Advocacy takes on many forms and for our American dreams.

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"Touring The Viscardi Center and the Henry Viscardi School was very eye opening for me. The work that’s being done there needs to be seen," he said. "Since then, I just slowly chose to become more involved."

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Good times, lots of selfies. That’s the best way to describe the 2017 Senior Class Trip last spring. After endless hours spent studying and prepping for college, soon-to-be HVS grads finally had a chance to get away and share one last hurrah together. It was a rare occasion for seniors to have fun as a group outside of class, as many live far apart from each other and have varying medical needs.

Students and teachers boarded an accessible Amtrak train destined for Baltimore, Maryland, where they toured the city and soaked up the perfect June weather. An afternoon at the Inner Harbor and National Aquarium were among the highlights of the week.

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Days of campus out&about

Viscardi Board member, Peter Thomas, and Debbie Cuevas, Denise Vargas and Becky Ogle and Viscardi’s own Dylan Hill by sharing personal and professional perspectives on how Medicaid cuts would drastically change their lives and those of other students, working individuals, and families. Face-reaching effects that could prevent them from attending school and work, and ultimately, even their place of residence choices.

I encourage you to view the short, powerful video features about Dylan and Denise on The Viscardi Center's YouTube page. They provide further education about what Medicaid does and how cuts and caps would affect individuals, like Dylan, Denise and myself, from pursuing our American dreams.

Advocacy takes on many forms and for many causes. Whether on a local, state or federal level, The Viscardi Center is committed to advocating for ourselves, others, systemic changes, and most certainly legislation to ensure we all have the opportunity to live a full life... one with purpose.

Joe N. Savasta
President & CEO

The current administration may be moving on to other high profile topics it campaigned on, but the disability community is certainly not out of the woods when it comes to its fight to ensure healthcare coverage. Thanks in part to the seven Republican holdouts, including Senators McCain, Collins and Murkowski, the Senate was unable to repeal the law that has provided health insurance to millions of Americans, many with disabilities... for now.

Fortunately, steadfast disability activists like Judy Heumann, Marca Bristo, Becky Gjele and Viscardi's own Dylan and Debbie Cuevas, Denise Vargas and Viscardi Board member, Peter Thomas, have lent their "voices" on and off The Viscardi School was very eye opening for me. The work that’s being done there needs to be seen," he said. "Since then, I just slowly chose to become more involved.

"I learned to advocate for myself, and learned what worked and what didn’t work for me." Before graduating high school and moving on to frequent the dean’s list in college, Dayna developed a joy for teaching as a volunteer in an elementary school classroom at Viscardi. Today she aims to use her personal experiences to encourage inclusion and accessibility in schools, so more students with disabilities have a chance to finally find their own voice.

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LICF’s funding of PROSPER (People Reaching for Opportunities to Succeed) — personally, educationally, and realistically), a one-year attendance retention program serving students from local public districts, enables young people to explore career paths during weekly vocational tours. These interactive experiences — at businesses and organizations like Covanta Energy, Lincoln Tech, and the Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County — teach life skills that can’t be taught in the classroom, and have been found to decrease student dropout rates. 98 percent of those who complete the program graduate high school to attend college and secure employment.

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You asked, we listened. The Viscardi Center is once again offering Arthritis Swim Classes to the community. Two six-week sessions will be held this fall in the Center’s indoor heated pool. Water exercises have been shown to relieve arthritis pain, improve range of motion, and promote relaxation when practiced regularly. Classes are ideal for adults who would like to reduce joint stress and boost overall fitness.

**Youth Transition Services**

Youth Transition Services programs at The Viscardi Center assist students in high school, those in its program, with college and career readiness. Students participate in workplace simulations that incorporate hands-on learning about the workforce. Career exploration and mentoring programs offer students an authentic experience of the workplace, independence, and leadership.

**Reaching for Opportunities to Succeed**

The National Business & Disability Council at The Viscardi Center is holding an informational event for companies in recognition of October’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) on October 12.

To join us, call 516.465.3748 or visit ViscardiCenter.org.