

‘There was always room in Mary’s heart’

CTI celebrates retirement of beloved employee Renn after 42 years

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PUBLISHED: August 10, 2020 at 2:27 p.m. | UPDATED: August 12, 2020 at 7:55 a.m.



COURTESY CTI

Kind of like Publisher’s Clearing Hous, CTI had flowers and balloons delivered to Mary Renn recently at her home in southern New Hampshire. Renn also received a CTI rocking chair.

LOWELL — In her 42 years of working at Community Teamwork Inc., Mary Renn went above and beyond. Whether it was organizing the annual event at Lenzi’s or

bringing endless patience to her work with CTI's families and teachers, Renn could always be counted on.

Now recently retired, Renn's co-workers are already feeling her absence.

"You'd ask her for one thing and she'd come back with 10 things that you needed that you didn't know (you needed)," said Jenny Pickett, intake manager at Child and Family Services. "She was kind of magic."



From left, Karen Frederick, CEO, Mary Renn, Rita Dee O'Brien, CTI Board Member,

Renn came to CTI as a teacher's aide. Her son had been participating in CTI's Head Start program, in which parents are encouraged to volunteer once a month. Soon, Renn began volunteering more frequently, and it did not take long for teachers to ask if she could help as a substitute teacher.

"By the end of the year, I was going in every week," Renn said.

What appealed to Renn about Head Start was the program's independent learning philosophy. The children learned at their own pace, she said.

With CTI's help, Renn attended Wheelock College and got her degree to teach, all while working at CTI and raising two kids at home.

Over the course of her career at CTI, Renn has served in multiple capacities, including as a supervisor overseeing five classrooms and their teachers. Most recently she worked in intake, helping families through the process.

"She could walk them through the process as patiently, so patiently, as anyone ever could and help them get the services ... that they need," said Pat Sawyer, a longtime CTI associate and teacher. "Very often, when parents arrive at CTI's doorstep, they are, if not in outright crisis, they are in need, and to have someone like Mary to deal with right away was such a good thing."

Since Renn's retirement, Pickett said her team at CTI have already wanted to call her with questions, to which Pickett has had to tell them to let Renn enjoy retirement.

At a recent Zoom party celebrating Renn, Sawyer recalled at least two people asking Renn where to find things at the office.

According to Pickett, Renn's experience working across CTI's various departments made her a tremendous resource.

For Renn, the timing felt right to retire this year. At 66, she is young enough to travel and enjoy her hobbies, like sewing and arts and crafts; not to mention her six grandchildren.

"My husband has been retired for seven or eight years and, honestly, I've been a little jealous that he gets to stay home," Renn said.

Though enjoying retirement, Renn said she misses the people with whom she worked. Especially the Friday lunches they would spend together talking about their weekend plans.

"It's a really diverse group, and everybody looks out for everybody else," she said. "You know that you're there for them and they're there for you."

At Renn's recent goodbye Zoom party, she was able to talk with not only her Friday lunch group but co-workers from her early CTI days. She said it was a blast.

"It was people I haven't worked with or haven't seen in maybe 15 years," Renn said. "My old supervisors were there. It was just kind of nice to talk to everybody."

In addition to the party, CTI organized a "Publisher's Clearing House"-themed presentation of a rocking chair the nonprofit gave Renn for her retirement.

It is a testament to the impact Renn has had through her work.

Pickett sees Renn's warmth and dedication reflected in everything she did at CTI; even the annual holiday door-decorating competition.

One year, Pickett's team decided to decorate their doors based upon children's books. Renn decided to design her door based on "The Mitten," which tells the story of a mitten dropped in the snow. Woodland animals find the mitten and one by one they crawl into the mitten and it is able to hold them all.

In creating her door, Renn created animals out of felt and knitted her own mitten so that anyone passing by the door could play out the story and fit the animals in the mitten.

"In a lot of ways, that is kind of her," Pickett said. "There's always room in the mitten for another person. There was always room in Mary's heart."



Emma Murphy | Multimedia journalist

Emma R. Murphy joined The Sun as a reporter covering Billerica, Tewksbury and Wilmington in 2019. Previously, Emma spent four years covering Brookline and Needham for the Brookline TAB and Needham Times. A University of Vermont graduate, Emma enjoys kayaking, cooking and traveling. She once hiked coast to coast across northern England.

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