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Behind the Scenes: A Conversation with Our Communications Team

NORTHERN NEW YORK – Both members of Citizen Advocates' Network Communications & Marketing team bring unique perspectives to their work. Edward Kirkpatrick, Network Director of Communications & Marketing, grew up in small town Oklahoma and found his way to the North Country in 2021, while Network Communications Specialist Trevor Buchanan's work is informed by his history as a counselor for Citizen Advocates and St. Joseph's Addiction Treatment & Recovery Centers.

They recently sat down to discuss their work amplifying the voices and impact of Citizen Advocates, St. Joseph's and their affiliates across Northern New York.

Buchanan: Edward, you came into this role without a healthcare background. What parts of your work do you find most energizing or personally meaningful?

Kirkpatrick: Those early moments on the job really stick with me because I didn't have that background coming in. The first time someone came up to me at an outreach event and shared their experience receiving care at one of our behavioral health urgent care centers, or the first time a family member thanked me for the work we do—those moments really stuck with me.

But what about you? I've been with you in the community when former patients of yours stopped to tell you about how they're doing in their recovery journeys. What parts of the job energize you most?

Buchanan: That's exactly what drives me. As a former substance use counselor, I feel fortunate to be able to use that skill set to support the amazing work of our frontline teams. Making sure that the hard work of counselors, direct support professionals, nurses and everyone else gets the recognition it deserves—that's a responsibility I'm proud to bear. There's something powerful about being able to bridge those worlds.

People might see us out in the community taking photos and posting on social media, but there's a lot more happening behind the scenes. What are some parts of your role that folks inside and outside our organizations might not realize you handle?

Kirkpatrick: Like you said, we wear a lot of hats. We write social media posts, blog posts and internal all-staff messaging; create flyers for behavioral health groups; design billboards; order stress balls with Citizen Advocates' and St. Joseph's logos on them; take photos and video—and a whole lot else. You



never know what's going to land on your desk in this job. One day you're helping plan an employee awards ceremony, the next you're designing directional signage for a parking lot.

Buchanan: We're also often the face of St. Joseph's and Citizen Advocates at outreach events. That requires us to be strategic in how we present ourselves and connect people to services, making sure our messaging lines up with each agency's identity.

Kirkpatrick: When I joined the Communications & Marketing team under Joe Riccio [who is now Citizen Advocates' Senior Director of External Affairs], one of my key objectives was to increase our outreach efforts across Northern New York. For years, Citizen Advocates was somewhat of a "sleeping giant"—a major employer in the region, but not well known to people who didn't work here or access our services.

That first year, Citizen Advocates participated in 45 outreach events from Watertown to Plattsburgh. The next year it was 73 events, and last year, Citizen Advocates, St. Joseph's and our affiliates attended 125 events. None of that would be possible without dozens of employees who make time to represent our agencies, but I'm proud to have been part of building that up.

What accomplishments stand out for you?

Buchanan: This year, St. Joseph's launched an e-mail campaign to strengthen connections with our referral sources. By taking a proactive approach to addressing capacity gaps at the inpatient facility and the Col. C. David Merkel, MD Veterans and First Responders Residential Program, we've been able to get ahead of slow periods and take quick action when we see dips in the number of people we're serving.

It's really rewarding to see communications work translating directly into people getting the help they need. That's the kind of operational impact that shows how Citizen Advocates' and St. Joseph's marketing efforts aren't just about awareness—they're helping to keep our programs running at capacity so we can serve more people.

Kirkpatrick: Exactly. We like to say that we connect people to possibilities. Looking at the bigger picture, how else do you see our department's work strengthening our missions and connecting our organizations with the communities we serve?

Buchanan: We're educating our communities about mental health, addiction treatment and the services available to them from Citizen Advocates, St. Joseph's and our affiliates. We're also recruiting compassionate professionals to our teams and celebrating our incredible team members whose work transforms lives every day.

A recent story that combines all those threads is our [profile](#) of Mian Jing Zheng. We highlighted Jing's extraordinary achievements, the work of his team to support him and the programs available to community members seeking similar success.

Kirkpatrick: That's it. At the end of the day, we're storytellers in service of a mission. Every post, every photo, every outreach event is about making sure the right person finds the right service at the right time. And when we do our jobs well, it has a real operational impact—facilities stay full, programs get the support they need and communities understand the resources available to them. That's what makes this work so meaningful.



If you're interested in learning more about a career at Citizen Advocates or St. Joseph's Addiction Treatment & Recovery Centers, visit citizenadvocates.net/careers or stjoestreatment.org/careers to explore current opportunities.

CAPTION: Edward Kirkpatrick, Network Director of Communications & Marketing, and Trevor Buchanan, Network Communications Specialist, represent Citizen Advocates and St. Joseph's at Malone's Summer Fest.

ABOUT CITIZEN ADVOCATES

At Citizen Advocates, our mission is Making Lives Better. The individuals, families and communities we serve receive a full range of health and lifestyle care through innovative, high-quality services and programs. In addition to providing a wide range of quality clinical services, Citizen Advocates offers supports that promote individual health through stable housing, job training and transportation. This is achieved through a person-centered approach that supports and celebrates each individual's choices. We are here to make a positive difference in the life of any individual needing help along the unique road to health, independence and fulfillment.

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