

The LOOP

Read about the latest news with all the Aurora families!



Owners Corner

This edition by Dave Barnard, CEO

Hello, Fellow Owners!

Welcome to the new Aurora Loop! Years ago, Aurora produced a monthly newsletter called *The Beacon*. We used that medium to provide updates and announcements of what was going on throughout AuroraLand. Over the years, as we all became busier and busier, *The Beacon* faded from existence. *The Loop* was born out of its loss and became a brief way to hit some of the highlights of what was happening in Aurora. A group of our staff thought it was a good idea to bring back more detailed communication on a regular basis to ensure communication on topics relative to your involvement with Aurora. Thus the new version of *The Loop*.

In *The Beacon*, one of the features was the "CEO Corner." It was my way of sharing my thoughts and updates of Aurora happenings with all staff. You will note that this column is now known as the "Owners Corner." This column exists so that any of our owners (yes, I am one, but there are hundreds through the ESOP) will be able to offer thoughts and insights on Aurora. Being that this is the inaugural version of the new *Loop*, I have been asked to kick this column off.

The new *Loop* will provide an opportunity for communication on important topics of interest in AuroraLand. We will do our best to pick topics that will

be interesting and valuable for you. We also will use this forum to address your questions that you might have on any topic related to Aurora and our work.

I also want to use this space to address, and not ignore, the 800 lb. gorilla in the room. I think it is safe to say that the biggest thing that happened to Aurora, and the world, over the past 18 months has been the COVID pandemic. We have navigated the pandemic in an amazing way. All of it is thanks to you, the Aurora staff, who have stepped up and, as Churchill said, "stayed calm and carried on."

I want to thank all of you for keeping Aurora on an even keel and for being the heroes that you are. The pandemic continues, but as we learn more about it we are finding ways of dealing with it better. It might be a while before we can fully put this thing in the rearview mirror, but I am fully confident that Aurora's future will only be strengthened by our working together to get through this.

I cannot express how much I appreciate all of your efforts. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Please make the time to read your new *Loop* each time it comes out. It should provide important and timely information for you and your relationship with Aurora. Thank you for all that you do.

Stay Vigilant

We are experiencing a significant increase in the numbers of employees who are being impacted by COVID-19. Aurora, as a health care provider, is required to adhere to the guidance from the Department of Health Services related to COVID-19 illness and exposures in assisted living. That means the potential for lost work time and additional open shifts to cover. We can all take steps to reduce the impact COVID-19 has on our company and the consumers we serve.



- **Use appropriate PPE.** Our policy continues to indicate that all Direct Support employees regardless of vaccination status should be masked. Masks are available at every operation, office and Day Center.
- **We encourage you to consider being vaccinated if you haven't already done so.** Speak with your personal health care provider if you have questions about the vaccine. All COVID-19 vaccinations continue to be free for everyone.
- **All employees should monitor themselves for symptoms and call the COVID line to report them.** Additionally exposure to another person who is known to be positive for COVID-19 should also be reported. **1-877-301-5587**
- **Take care of yourself at work and away from work.**

We have done a remarkable job weathering the pandemic from the beginning thanks to the hard work and dedication of our entire Aurora team. Let's continue to do what it takes to keep our boat afloat! Thank you for everything you do.

Benefits Update

Aurora is pleased to announce a change in eligibility for our **Longevity Bonus** and **Health, Dental, and Life Insurance**. Now more employees are eligible!

Effective October 1, 2021, eligibility for the Longevity Bonus will change from 39+ hours/week to 16+ hours/week during the employee's anniversary year. The amount of the bonus will be prorated based on the average hours worked in the previous 12 months of employment. For example, if you average 20 paid hours per week in the previous 12 months before your anniversary date and you have been employed for 3 years, you will receive a longevity bonus of \$100 one month after your anniversary date.

Aurora provides health, dental, and life insurance for employees who average 130 hours per month or 30 hours per week. If you are hired with a full-time status and have averaged 130 hours per week, you are eligible to enroll in Aurora's health, dental, and life insurance the first of the month following a 1-month orientation period and a 60-day waiting period.

If you are hired with a part-time status and you are transferred to a full-time status, you are eligible to enroll in Aurora's health, dental, and life insurance the first of the month following a 60-day waiting period. We will send an enrollment packet, including the premium cost, to your home address one month prior to your enrollment date. You will also receive a notification of enrollment via UKG.

Recruitment Update

Where are all the people?

You would have to be living under a rock to be unaware that it has been painfully challenging to find employees lately. **What is going on?**

For the last several years—even before COVID-19—the number of people leaving the labor market has exceeded the number of people entering it. There has been simply a math problem. Enter COVID-19 ... Business slow-downs and shut-downs impacted a large portion of the labor force and 2.5 million women throughout the U.S. left the labor market, often due to child care and other family care issues. Some people who were laid off or left for other reasons have re-entered the labor market, but many have not. Some people are uncomfortable returning, and some have decided they can manage without working.

In Wisconsin, the current unemployment rate is 3.9%, and in Colorado it is 5.9%. Full employment is around 3%. At that rate, anyone who wants to work and is able to work IS working. So what do we do now? This is where YOU come in!

Aurora is currently developing a recruitment plan that targets passive job seekers – those we need to go get. The components of this plan include:

Culture: We need to secure a culture in all work locations that make Aurora a sought after employer. We all play an important role in that. Consider what

you and your team members can do to improve the work experience here.

Employer Value Proposition: What do we offer employees that other employers may not? What are the specific factors of the work that are compelling to applicants? We will look for your feedback in this area!

Reviews: We need to address negative reviews current and former employees but we also need to solicit positive reviews from our BEST employees! We all know we hear complaints about a business much more frequently than we hear the positive feedback.

Video: Showing potential employees what we do can have a powerful impact and appeal to potential employees. Consider we do at your location that might make that impression.

Social Media: Recruiting is now far more than posting a "Now Hiring" sign on the door – it's a marketing strategy! You will learn more about this in the coming months.

In addition to these, we continue to offer the \$1,000 sign-on bonus and finder's fee for direct support positions. We invite you to share your ideas and suggestions to help us develop the best strategy possible.

Thank you for your continued dedication and countless hours supporting those who need our BEST!

October is Mental Health Awareness Month

The most current statistics available from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) are from 2019 and indicate that 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness. We know the pandemic of the past 18 months has increased stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and other issues for many Americans. Rates of mental illness and suicide have sky-rocketed.

If we don't care for ourselves, we can't care for others. Please remember:

- Self-care is an important part of managing mental illness. Eating right, exercising, getting adequate sleep, having hobbies and healthy relationships can do wonders for our mental health.
- Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Midwesterners are pretty stoic about their emotional iceberg, difficult, painful things to ourselves. What you encounter from others is only the tip of their iceberg. Be kind to yourself and others! A little grace goes a long way!
- Use your resources! Yours include REALiving, our EAP partner! Every employee has access to this free resource. Don't go it alone!
- We care about you!

For more information on Mental Illness and Suicide Prevention, please go to NAMI.org. Mental Health First Aid classes are FREE and readily available online.

How to Access Your EAP Benefits

Visit www.REALiving.com and click on "EAP Login."

Username: Aurora@REALiving.com

Password: Auroraemployee

Or call our **24/7 Call Center** to get set up for professional coaching or counseling: **1.877.256.9302**

Welcome Aboard!

Please give our new hires a warm welcome.

Jennifer Thomas
Recruiting Coordinator
Aurora Community Services
Mosinee office

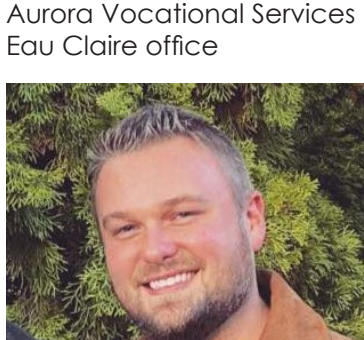


Jennifer opened Skin Mint Aesthetics & Spa in Weston, WI in 2018 with no resources, no funding, and no clientele. She grew her business entirely from the networking and marketing capabilities of social media. As a business owner, she deployed marketing and sales initiatives, created branded content and sales platforms to attract visitors, gain referrals and convert them into satisfied customers.

Her eye for curation and creation caught the attention of other local business owners who commissioned her freelance skills to help design content and landing pages for their startups as well.

Jennifer attended the Minnesota School of Business and earned an associate degree in 2013. She and husband David live in Kronenwetter and have a soon-to-be 7-year-old daughter Lenny who is in first grade. She enjoys cooking Italian food, listening to true crime podcasts, and reading historical fiction.

Tony Mesner-Nayes
Quality Assurance Specialist
Aurora Vocational Services
Eau Claire office



I started my career with Aurora Community Services in September 2021. I'm ecstatic to be joining the Quality Assurance team. I'm so excited to be working in a company that helps so many in the surrounding community and makes such an immense impact.

Tony grew up in Chippewa Falls and attended the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He majored in Mass Communication with an emphasis in Public Relations, and he has a minor in Sociology.

Tony previously worked in retail management and professional sales. He says he is now ready to take on a completely new challenge and adventure as a Quality Assurance Specialist. He looks forward to applying the skills he has gained with previous work experience and education to his new position.

As a huge fan of the world of favorite arts, Tony loves museums, dance, music, fashion, and movies. One of his favorite things to do is go to concerts. He and husband Brett usually have quite a few concerts planned every year.

Holly Parker MS, CRC, BS, RHIT
Aurora Community Counseling
Ladysmith office

Holly graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stout with a Master of Science degree in Rehabilitation Counseling in 2018. Holly applied to Aurora as she enjoys assisting consumers live their life to its fullest with community resource utilization.

Holly enjoys education, being with family, and of course, being with her paw-son, Walker. She is married with two grown children. She enjoys gardening, eating healthy, family events, dining out, and food preservation. Holly is interested in furthering education.

Ashley Tyler
Aurora Residential Alternatives
Caregiver, Eau Claire

Why I applied for the job: I love making a difference in the lives of others! I'm also a second year Human Services student and needed a field site for experience hours.

What I will bring to the job: I'll bring creativity, positivity, and teamwork to the job.

My background: I've always had a strong passion for helping others and making a positive impact within my community, which is why I chose this field.

Family: I live with my fiancé. We're currently expecting our first child, due this February.

Hobbies/Interests: I love writing poetry and painting.

Corinna Bignell
Aurora Residential Alternatives
Caregiver, Menomonie

Why I applied for the job: It's a job that I enjoyed in the past, and I was looking for work, so I decided to see if Aurora was hiring.

What I will bring to the job: Job experience, dependability, compassion.

My background: My employment background has mostly been caregiving, some cleaning and cooking, but mostly caregiving.

Family: Husband and one child.

Hobbies/Interests: Animals, gardening.

Savannah Lefevers
Aurora Vocational Services
Employment Specialist I, Menomonie

Why I applied for the job: To encourage and help others.

What I will bring to the job: Support, humor, and work as a team.

Family: 3 children.

Hobbies/Interests: Spending time with family and friends. I love playing sports—basketball, softball, and volleyball.

Aurora Vocational Services
Nichole Hartung, Eau Claire
Ian McAlister, Eau Claire

Aurora Residential Alternatives
Andrea Miara, Menomonie
Dillon Brummard, Mosinee
Christopher Weier, La Crosse
Misty McCollough, New Richmond
Katelyn Lenk, Eau Claire
Amber Gravvunder, Mosinee
Richard Jaramillo, Colorado

Meet the Quality Assurance Team

Aurora Vocational Services began contracting with the Western Region Recovery & Wellness Consortium (WRRWC) in January 2019 to provide Quality Assurance services. Our contract currently includes 5 full-time positions. Andrea Olson, Brett Mesner-Nayes, Carla Arnold, Jessica Gossen, and Tony Mesner-Nayes are the Quality Assurance Specialists included in this contract and are based out of the Aurora Vocational office in Eau Claire. Erik Olson also works remotely with this team on a part-time basis.

The WRRWC is a consortium of 9 counties working together to improve mental health and substance abuse delivery systems for public sectors. They currently partner with over 100 providers like Aurora to provide Comprehensive Community Services (CCS). CCS is an MA-covered, recovery-focused, integrated behavioral health program for adults and/or children with mental illness and/or substance use disorders. CCS programs are designed to be community-based, enhance recovery, and continually build on quality improvement.

The Aurora QA team works closely with providers and county staff ensuring that requirements of Medicaid and the DHS 36 Administrative Code are

met. The Quality Assurance Specialists are responsible for reviewing/gathering all provider certification documents, reviewing provider service notes, as well as facilitating consumer charts for County Service Reviewers. Additionally, the team provides training and support to providers as well as county staff.

The expansion of the QA contract has been very rewarding, and the QA team takes great pride in their contributions to the WRRWC Grand and CCS Program.



Left to right: Brett Mesner-Nayes, Jessica Gossen, Andrea Olson, and Tony Mesner-Nayes. Not pictured: Carla Arnold.

We Have the BEST Staff

During the month of October, we celebrate anniversaries for these Aurora managers:

Abbey Dieckman (2 years), **Cynthia Smith** (27 years), **Gina Krueger** (18 years), **Kevin Crowell** (1 year), **Rocio Seise** (5 years), **Emily Leaver** (3 years), **Courtney Goff** (2 years), **Julia Delzer** (1 year), **Jill Mattson** (17 years), **Sarah Scheeringa** (21 years), and **Wendy Jagoditsh** (17 years).

Combined, that's a whopping 114 YEARS of experience within our ranks!
Thank you for sharing your time and talents with Aurora!

Information for *The Loop* may be sent to asolberg@auroraservices.com at any time. Publication is usually on the Friday of the 2nd full week of the month.