



(Above): Olamide Taiwo, who works in Dedham, received a \$10,000 Maxo Joseph Award.

## MAB Community Services announces the 2023 Maxo Joseph Excellence in Direct Care awards recipients

Twelve honorees recognized for their tireless dedication to serving and supporting adults with disabilities

Photos by Darlene DeVita Photography



(Above): Judithe Vital, who works in Dedham, received a \$5,000 Maxo Joseph Award.

### Contributed to The Dedham Times

MAB Community Services, a leading social service agency supporting over 1,500 individuals with visual impairment, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and acquired brain injuries across Massachusetts, has announced the 12 honorees of the 2023 Maxo Joseph Excellence in Direct Care Awards.

All honorees were formally recognized at a ceremony and luncheon at MAB's headquarters in Brookline on Thursday, July 13.

Established in 2021, these awards honor direct care staff in MAB's Adult Disability Services division who go above and beyond in their commitment to the participants they support.

Their dedication reflects the legacy of Maxo Joseph, an exceptional caregiver and colleague who passed away in 2020. Totalling \$50,000 annually, the Maxo Joseph Awards provide individual recipients with awards ranging from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

"We're very grateful for the opportunity to celebrate our hardworking direct care staff with much deserved recognition through these awards," said Barbara Salisbury, CEO of MAB Community Services. "Many of this year's honorees were nominated by multiple people – colleagues, managers, and families of participants – which is a true testament to the impact they have on the individuals they support. It has been incredibly heartwarming to read their stories describing how they work to ensure that our participants are able to live full and satisfying lives."

Out of 28 nominees, 12 direct care staff received awards this year, representing MAB group homes across Greater Boston and Central Massachusetts. The 2023 honorees are:

#### \$10,000 award recipients

Said Barko – Watertown  
Olamide Taiwo – Dedham

Olamide is recognized for her steadfast determination as a residential counselor at MAB's group home in Dedham. During her first 10 years working at MAB, she built a close relationship with a participant who lived in a separate apartment on the second floor of the group home. Olamide supported the participant in living the life he wanted, driving him to his mother's house and helping him build a shed there, while also patiently working with the participant to help him manage his impulses.

Two years ago, Olamide's MAB coworkers supported her as she worked at MAB and studied to become an RN. They helped out with her shifts and drove her children home from school. Olamide has chosen to stay at MAB, providing direct care to participants while giving back to

all who helped her earn her nursing degree.

Olamide now uses her training to diagnose participants' medical issues, including ear infections and early-stage gout, before they become emergencies. This is especially important when caring for non-verbal participants. Olamide also trains MAB staff to recognize these kinds of issues and to carry out medical plans as prescribed, helping staff to become more confident in their own abilities.

She is currently studying to become a nurse practitioner, working full-time at MAB, working 20 hours a week overnight at a nursing home, and caring for her two children.

Olamide received one of two \$10,000 Maxo Joseph Awards, which is the largest award given.

"Olamide approaches each task and opportunity with courage and grace," said Semiu Adebowale, Taiwo's manager. "She relies on her years of expertise to support her coworkers and participants through difficult times, caring for them as if they are family."

#### \$5,000 award recipients

Reynissa Prince – MABWorks, Allston  
Lukman Salami – Roslindale  
Ifeoluwa Alabi – Belmont  
Judithe Vital – Dedham

Judithe Vital goes above and beyond in her role as Residential Counselor to make sure MAB's group home in Dedham is operating smoothly. She is a natural-born leader and is a model for the other staff, shaping their sense of how the job should be done.

Judithe excels at instructing staff in areas they need the most guidance by patiently explaining things until they understand. She has high standards, but always has her coworkers' backs, making them feel good about meeting those standards.

Judithe puts the participants' needs first and is responsive to their requests, as well as requests made by family members. She is knowledgeable about each participants' schedules and makes sure to advocate for them at appointments when they cannot do so themselves. She also encourages them to be independent, cheering them on when they accomplish something new.

Judithe received a \$5,000 Maxo Joseph Award.

"Judithe was there for me and my family when we needed someone most and was always first to communicate with us," said Diane McCormack, the mother of a participant in Vital's care, who presented her with the Maxo Joseph Award. "I was sad when I thought Judithe had left the organization a couple of years ago, until I found out that the only reason I wasn't seeing her anymore was because she was taking the overnight shift to be with my daughter when she needed someone."

#### \$2,000 award recipients

Haley Kinnon – Individual Supports  
Candice Kunneh – Hopkinton  
Choice Omorotionmwan – Belmont  
Osasogie (Pearl) Oni-Edwards – West Roxbury  
Jeremiah Veal – Hyde Park

Macdonald Quaye, who works in Shrewsbury, was also recognized with a \$2,000 Rising Star Award.

The length of service these staff members have dedicated to MAB ranges from two to 18 years, with an average of six years. Honorees are chosen by a committee consisting of MAB staff, community supporters, and family members of the participants the nominees serve.

The awards are named for Maxo Joseph, a dedicated caregiver who served MAB participants for nearly 20 years. Nominees reflect Maxo's life and legacy. Jay Lupica, in his role as Trustee of the Patricia W. and Alfred E. Farah Charitable Trust, has matched \$100,000 in donations twice since the awards' establishment, enabling MAB to secure \$400,000 to fund eight annual awards cycles.

In addition to recognizing direct care staff for their service to MAB participants, the Maxo Joseph Awards help to create a culture of recognition which improves recruitment and retention. While the direct care industry experiences an annual turnover rate between 40 and 60 percent, MAB's turnover in direct care was less than 17 percent during the past year. Those who wish to support MAB's initiative to reward high-performing staff may do so here, designating their gift to the Maxo Joseph Awards.

**About MAB Community Services:** MAB Community Services has been creating opportunities for people with disabilities since 1903. Formerly known as the Massachusetts Association for the Blind, MAB is one of the oldest social service agencies in the nation assisting individuals with blindness or visual impairment. Over time, MAB has grown to serve people with a wider range of disabilities. MAB's three divisions are the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, which offers a variety of services statewide; the Ivy Street School, which serves a neurodiverse population of students, including those on the autism spectrum, with behavioral health challenges, and with brain injuries; and Adult Disability Services, which serves individuals with intellectual disabilities and brain injuries.

Founded in 1973, MAB's Adult Disability Services division offers 29 community-based group homes with 24/7 support. Through each division and program, MAB's goal is to provide the support needed for each person to actively participate in their community and to live a full and satisfying life.

## Water quality improvement in Mother Brook

Mother Brook, from page 1

"It's great to see E. coli levels back down after the slight increase last year, and well below the values from 2017 to 2019," said Jason Mammone, Director of Engineering for the Town of Dedham. "Additionally, phosphorus levels have decreased, and oxygen levels remained healthy for fish, even in the face of severe drought" added Mammone.

Mother Brook occupies a unique position in the Neponset Watershed, as it connects the Charles River to the main stem of the Neponset. Therefore, some water quality issues found in the Brook originate upstream in the Charles. To fully understand the contributing sources to Mother Brook, the Association will be working with its partner in the Charles to work towards reductions in E. coli and nutrients.

The water quality monitoring program that collects this data is part of a larger watershed restoration effort. Throughout the Neponset River Watershed, efforts to improve water quality, restore river and salt marsh habitat, and reconnect the streams to allow fish passage are all underway. "All of these issues are connected," says NepRWA's Director of River Restoration, Dr. Sean McCarty. "Removing old dams helps prepare our communities for climate change, improves fish passage and dissolved oxygen levels, and can limit the amount of algae overgrowth. Replanting along the riverbank helps filter storm runoff and stabilize the banks, improving water quality for fishing, boating, and swimming," McCarty adds.

The Neponset River Watershed Association is a local environmental non-profit that publishes an annual report on the health of the local streams and Neponset River in Dedham and neighboring towns that drain into the Neponset River. The water quality data used in the report is collected as part of the Association's volunteer-based "Community Water Monitoring Network" program, that collects water samples monthly from May to October to test for constituents that impact safety for recreation and wildlife.

For the full water quality report visit NepRWA's website: <https://www.neponset.org/town-water-quality-reports>.

## Notable

Coastal Carolina University in Conway, South Carolina has announced that **Sean Nilson** of Dedham was named to the President's List (4.0 GPA) for the Spring 2023 semester, and **Catherine Morse** of Dedham was named to the Dean's List (GPA of at least 3.5, or at least 3.25 for first-year students).

Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island has announced that **Allison Logan** of Dedham was named to the President's List (4.0 GPA) for the Spring 2023 semester, and **Amanda Noonan** of Dedham was named to the Dean's List (GPA of at least 3.4).