

This month I would like to take time to highlight and celebrate a few fun and exciting events that have happened since our last newsletter. As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words.



### Hiawatha Homes Celebrates Dawn Bartel for her Long-Term Service with Hiawatha Homes

Sending a big Thank You to Rachel Lucey and the Forest Knoll Team for hosting a retirement party for **Dawn Bartel, Direct Support Professional**. In addition to being a full-time teacher and educator, Dawn worked as a Direct Support Professional for Hiawatha Homes for 40 years! During those years she supported several people through their life experiences and helped train in many team members. We appreciate Dawn's long-term service and dedication to Hiawatha Homes. Congratulations to Dawn!

We wish her the best during her retirement.



### 2025 Festival of Trees – Friday Night Dance Party

Thank you to our HH Team Members who assisted several people we support with attending the Festival of Trees Friday Night Dance Party. It was a fun night of dancing, visiting with friends and family members, and celebrating our Mission with others throughout our community! A Big Shout Out to our HH Foundation Team, volunteers, Kenny, and board members for supporting us with a successful 40th Year Festival of Trees, a celebration of giving.





## December Leadership/Administration Team Holiday Meeting

Each quarter our HH Leadership Team Member meets to discuss important Hiawatha Homes updates, work on our HH Action Planning efforts, discuss legislative efforts, and hear from speakers on topics related to the services we provide.

This year's Holiday Meeting was all about **TEAMWORK!** We worked on two fun activities that focused on completing a specific holiday list or task with each person contributing to the team's success. During our Creative Holiday Craft activity, team members had 5 minutes to discuss how they would work together, only using one hand, to create the most crative and festive design. Each team then had one vote as to which team created the most creative holiday design, they could not vote for their own design.



**\*\*Congratulations to team Jingle Squad for winning the most creative and fun design.**

**As we end our 2025 year together, I would like to THANK each one of YOU, our HH Team Members, for your time and commitment to our Hiawatha Homes Mission!**

**I hope you have a fun and safe holiday season!**

*Cindy S. Ostrowski*

Cindy Ostrowski, CEO

To View All the Trees from 2025

[Click Here](#)



Pictured: Our HH Leadership/Admin.  
Team Member's creative holiday designs.  
Great teamwork everyone!



Pictured: Festival of Trees - Tip the Tree Winner  
Candy, Candy Canes, Candy Corns, & Syrup -  
Designed by: The Birr Family

# DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

**Fadumo Hassan - 25 years**

**Veth La Baw - 8 years**

**Bukola Odewale - 3 years**

**Faduma Mahamed - 3 years**

**Rahsaan Price - 3 years**

**Crystal Carlson - 2 years**

**Sudi Adow - 2 years**

**Amer Mabok - 1 year**

**Halimo Galibed - 1 year**

**Kelsey Carney - 1 year**

**Ryan Anderson - 1 year**



# THE LIGHT WE BRING TO ONE ANOTHER



## HR Corner with Christopher Nelson, HR Director

As we enter December, many of us begin reflecting on the year; what we've learned, what we've overcome, and what we've built together. This month looks different for each person. For some, it is a time of celebration and family. For others, a time of quiet reflection. And for many, it brings mixed emotions. What we all share, regardless of our background, culture, or faith, is a need for connection, respect, and community. We all look for warmth during cold days, support in difficult moments, and the feeling that we belong.

At Hiawatha Homes, **you** create that sense of belonging.

Every day, in small and meaningful ways, we have the opportunity to bring the gift of light into the lives of the individuals we support and into the lives of your coworkers:

- When you offer patience to someone who is struggling and just listen without judging.
- When you help an individual feel safe, calm, or understood and not get frustrated at or with them.
- When you talk to someone directly about your concern instead of talking behind their back.
- When you respect different traditions, routines, and beliefs in a house and with each other.
- When you advocate quietly and consistently for the needs and dignity of the individuals in your care.
- When you make time to train and coach someone new, treating them with respect, and making them feel welcome.

These moments matter deeply. They reflect not just your kindness, but the values that make Hiawatha Homes who we are: **advocacy, choice, respect, relationships, and innovation**; innovation not only in technology or practices, but in the creative, compassionate ways you problem-solve and care for others.

Last month, we talked about what real leadership looks like; leadership built on integrity, honesty, and authenticity. This month, I see that same leadership in the way you live our values every day. Not because of a position or title, but because of the choices you make, the compassion you show, and the steadiness you bring to the people around you.

As we close out the year, I want to thank each of you for the impact you make. You create a place where the individuals we support feel dignity and belonging, where families feel trust, and where your coworkers know they are valued.

My wish for each of you this month is simple: **that you find moments of peace, joy, and connection; whatever those look like for you.**

Thank you for being part of what makes Hiawatha Homes strong, resilient, and full of heart.

With appreciation,

Christopher

# Leading Above the Line

## HR Corner with Christopher Nelson, HR Director

At Hiawatha Homes, leadership is not defined by a job title. It shows up in the choices we make every day, how we interact, how we communicate, and how we hold ourselves and one another accountable. Authentic leadership comes from integrity, honesty, and the willingness to take responsibility for our actions.

One of the frameworks that helps guide our culture is the concept of staying Above the Line.

**Above the Line** = accountability, responsibility, and ownership

**Below the Line** = blame, denial, and excuses

No one stays above the line every moment, we're human. But strong teams recognize where they are and choose to rise above.

### **Below the Line: What We Avoid**

- Blame: pointing fingers instead of seeking understanding
- Denial: refusing to acknowledge our role or impact
- Excuses: focusing on reasons something can't be done

These behaviors slow us down, damage relationships, and create communication patterns, such as talking behind someone's back, that harms trust.

### **Above the Line: How We Choose to Lead**

- Accountability: taking responsibility for your actions and words
- Responsibility: fulfilling commitments and following through
- Ownership: stepping up instead of stepping back

### **Being above the line means:**

- Addressing concerns directly with the person involved
- Avoiding gossip or venting to someone who cannot fix the problem
- Taking concerns to a manager if direct communication isn't possible
- Speaking with honesty, respect, and professionalism
- Doing your part to create solutions, not additional problems

### **As a Leader (regardless of title):**

- Model respect and integrity
- Communicate clearly and directly
- Take ownership of decisions
- Seek solutions, not barriers
- Support team members with dignity
- Learn from mistakes without defensiveness
- Advocate for individuals and coworkers

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# Leading Above the Line Continued

## HR Corner with Christopher Nelson, HR Director

### As a Team Member:

- Treat others with respect
- Communicate concerns directly and constructively
- Avoid gossip and side conversations
- Support coworkers and the team
- Offer solutions when you see problems
- Take responsibility for your role and impact

### A Reminder We Use Often:

“Don’t tell me what you can’t do. Tell me what you can do and how you’re going to get it done.”

Every day, I see team members showing compassion, advocating for individuals, supporting coworkers, and living our values with consistency.

Leadership is not perfection. Leadership is choosing accountability, responsibility, and ownership, even when it’s uncomfortable.

If you aren’t practicing these, or it has been told that you need to start being “Above the Line”, make sure you have specific details of what that means. Hopefully, this information will help start conversations between each other and help to build a stronger team, no matter the size of your team.

Thank you for bringing these qualities to Hiawatha Homes for each other, the individuals we support, and the individual’s family/guardian.

With appreciation,

Christopher

## New Team Members

*Welcome to Hiawatha Homes!*

Sihaam Abdullahi

Erica Brawdy

Angeleigh Chinn

Brittne Cole

Emnet Heramo

Ayan Iman

Sari Johnson

Thomas Newman



# HIAWATHA HEROES

*December 2025*



## **Nadifo Mohamed**

### *Team Leader at Oronoco House*

Nadifo serves as the team leader at Oronoco house, and she is an integral part of our team. She is always willing to pitch in wherever she is needed. Whether she is picking up extra shifts, training new staff, or running to another house to fill in, you will always find Nadifo with a positive attitude. Her calm demeanor and problem-solving skills help create a steady and supportive environment for both the individuals and her coworkers. She leads by example, demonstrating professionalism, empathy, and dedication to serving the individuals. We are so grateful for everything Nadifo brings to our team.

# ***Did you know?***

## **NOMINATIONS**

Nominate a Hiawatha Hero by visiting  
[hiawathahomes.org/employee-login](https://hiawathahomes.org/employee-login)

## **REFER A FRIEND**

Refer an Employee by visiting  
[hiawathahomes.org/employee-login](https://hiawathahomes.org/employee-login)