



The Week in Photos:
Sun Journal photographers choose some of their favorite images from last week
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WORKING

Juwah and True – direct support professionals

By **CHRISTOPHER WHELOCK**
SUN JOURNAL

AUBURN — Gail True and Patience Success Juwah, or Success as she prefers to be called, are direct service professionals at John F. Murphy Homes. It's a challenging job that requires few skills to start, but an accumulation of specialized skills to become successful, including listening, problem-solving, communication and critical thinking.

At John F. Murphy Homes, DSPs work with children and adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities and autism spectrum disorder. True has 28 years of experience, 27 of them with John F. Murphy Homes. Juwah, originally from Nigeria, started her career as a direct service provider four



LEFT: Patience Success Juwah hugs a person she supports after helping her in the bathroom Dec. 13 at a group home in Auburn where she works as a direct support professional. **RIGHT:** Gail True, a direct support professional at John F. Murphy Homes, stands inside one of their group homes in Auburn on Dec. 13.



RUSS DILLINGHAM/SUN JOURNAL

years ago.

"I studied English and literature, you know, as that's my bachelor's degree," Juwah explained, "but coming here, I had to start all over again. So this was a job I felt I could fit in, like taking care of people

that really needed help."

Immigrants coming to Maine like Juwah frequently have university degrees or experience in healthcare but may need to retrain or recertify in order to work in the healthcare field in Maine.

Maine Department of Labor Commissioner Laura Fortman recently told a gathering of immigrant professionals in Lewiston that the state is looking to them to help fill the many open jobs in healthcare. Frequently, the biggest

holdup is obtaining work authorization.

Challenging work comes with rewards

Both True and Juwah work overnights, a notoriously difficult shift for

some workers, who have to adjust their lives to make it work. But it seems to work just fine for Juwah and True.

"I got married a few years after I started here," said True, "and it was perfect to work third shift because I didn't miss any of my children's activities. The only thing I missed was them getting up in the morning, but once they went to school, I was there when they got home. So, the biggest challenge is finding how do I get some sleep in my day."

For Juwah, she took the job at John F. Murphy Homes as a starting point. "But when I started doing the job, I realized it gives me joy," she explained. "It's something I enjoy doing, you know, putting smiles on their faces and

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How Maine changed in a turbulent 2023

The year saw record-breaking weather, housing prices, homelessness and violence

MAINE SUNDAY TELEGRAM STAFF REPORT

Maine is changing all the time, from the makeup of the population and the look of the landscape to the laws we have to abide by, the challenges we face and the places where we live, work and play.

On the eve of a new year, we're taking stock of the ways Maine changed in 2023 that will have lasting effects on how our state defines itself and is viewed by the rest of the world.

We felt the most fundamental change to our fabric in October when the deadliest mass shooting in the U.S. this year claimed the lives of 18 residents, left families and friends grieving, and put Lewiston on the long list of communities devastated by gun violence.

Also going down in the history books are stretches of record-breaking wet and hot weather, along with a storm this month that caused some of the worst flooding parts of the state have ever seen.

Homelessness, in Portland in particular, reached new heights this year, while drug overdose deaths took a downturn, reversing the recent trend. Housing prices hit a record high in June, and rents continue to rise, though Maine's short-term rental market seemed to reach a saturation point with increased vacancy rates



JOE PHELAN/KENNEBEC JOURNAL

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People hold candles and make the "I love you" sign at the end of a vigil for victims of Lewiston's mass shooting on Nov. 1.

L-A THIS WEEK

Monday, Jan. 1

LEWISTON - AUBURN — New Year's Day, schools and government offices closed.

Tuesday, Jan. 2

AUBURN — City Council workshop and meeting, 5:30 p.m. in the council chamber at Auburn Hall.

LEWISTON — Lewiston inaugural ceremony,

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Former central Maine DA remembered for toughness on crime, compassion for victims

By **JAKE FREUDBERG**
MORNING SENTINEL

When Julia Vigue was first hired in the 1980s as a victim witness advocate in the Kennebec and Somerset counties district attorney's office, she was warned that she may not get along with the office's tough boss, David Crook.

Crook, the district attorney, was "gruff." Vigue, on the other hand, was "tender-hearted."

But she soon realized that behind the rough exterior was a prosecutor who was doing all that he could to hold criminals accountable.

"For about 12 minutes, I was afraid of him," Vigue said. "Then, I realized, he was doing what I was trying to do, which was push for justice and help victims in any way he could."

That relentless sense of justice, along with his compassion for victims of crimes, are how colleagues and friends are remembering Crook, who served as district attorney for Kenne-



MORNING SENTINEL FILE

David Crook, the former longtime district attorney for Kennebec and Somerset counties, speaks outside Waterville District Court in 1997. Crook died this past November at age 77.

bec and Somerset counties for more than two decades.

Crook died Nov. 11 after his third bout with cancer. He was 77 and had been splitting time between his homes in Rome and Florida.

Originally from Maine, Crook was hired as a prosecutor for the Kennebec and Somerset district attorney's office in 1975. After being elected as district attorney in an unopposed

election in 1978, the Democrat served six consecutive terms until 2002, winning each election either unopposed or by comfortable margins.

As the counties' chief criminal prosecutor, he took an especially harsh approach in cases involving child abuse, drugs and operating under the influence, colleagues said. Crook, by his own tally

of about 1,500, prosecuted more child abuse and sexual abuse cases than any other DA in Maine at the time, according to his daughter, Kendra Crook.

"These were all very difficult cases going almost into territory that was not that well charted, and he didn't shy away from it at all," said Evert Fowle, who was Crook's first assistant DA for seven years and went on to replace him as district attorney.

Crook was also a proponent of victims' rights, helping to establish the office's victim witness advocate position early in his career and later supporting state legislators in passing a Victim's Bill of Rights.

By the end of his 24 years as DA, his office had collected \$6.2 million in restitution for crime victims, according to a Morning Sentinel report.

"When I first started it, the victims were stunned to get it," Crook told the Morning Sentinel in 2002, a few weeks be-

fore he left the post. "Now they get (angry) when they don't get it. That's the ultimate success: We've changed the expectation level of crime victims."

Crook, a native Maineborn in 1946, graduated from Brewer High School and the University of Maine. He began his career as a teacher and coach at Madison High School, but soon decided to go to law school.

After graduating with his law degree from Brooklyn Law School in 1972, Crook began his new career as an assistant DA in the Brooklyn District Attorney's office.

In 1975, he came back to Maine as an assistant DA for Kennebec and Somerset counties. When his boss, Joseph Jabar, announced he would be running for attorney general in 1978, Crook ran for the position unopposed and began his 24-year stint as the two counties' top prosecutor.

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Finding Our Voices gets holiday grant

Finding Our Voices has received a \$7,500 grant from Camden National Bank.

The donation will boost two key programs of the grassroots nonprofit breaking the silence of domestic abuse across Maine: The Get Out Stay Out Fund and dating-abuse awareness in schools, according to a news release from Patrisa McLean, CEO and founder of the nonprofit.

The Get Out Stay Out Fund provided \$85,000 in 2023 for shelter, car, legal, home security, and food expenses to 160 women across Maine fleeing domestic abuse and trying to get on their feet and also provide safety and stability for their children.

"The holidays have brought a sharp spike in referrals from district attorney offices, homeless shelters, mental health and recovery caseworkers etc., so getting such a big grant right now is like a Christmas miracle," said McLean.

This is the second year in a row that the bank has sponsored the group's student-outreach campaign. The bank-sponsored Finding Our Voices posters featuring first person accounts of dating abuse by 25 students made it into almost every Maine high school and many colleges and universities in 2023.

Greg Dufour, retiring as president and CEO of the bank after 14 years, welcomed McLean and Finding Our Voices Board



PHOTO BY VIKTORIE MATHIAU

"Mr. Dufour and Mr. Griffiths were good sports about wearing our trademark yellow for the photo," said Patrisa McLean. Yellow is the nonprofit's color according to McLean, because "we are survivors of domestic abuse who have managed to cross over into the light of freedom and safety and are now shining a light for the benefit of all in Maine." From left are Simon Griffiths, McLean and Nicole Gogan, both of Finding Our Voices; and Camden National Bank President Greg Dufour on the right.

Treasurer Nicole Gogan into the bank's headquarters following the awarding of the grant for a conversation with his successor, Simon Griffiths.

For more information, visit findingourvoices.net or email McLean at hello@findingourvoices.net.

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Patrisa McLean, Finding Our Voices CEO and founder

1,000 Lives Campaign for Maine launched

PORTLAND — The state of medical professionals have launched the 1,000 Lives Campaign for Maine, aimed at reducing deaths from opioid drug overdoses by 1,000 during a five-year period beginning today.

Modeled on the Institute for HealthCare Improvement's "100,000 Lives Campaign" to address preventable medical errors in hospitals, the campaign is a systematic, clinician-led, collaborative campaign to reduce the number of predicted opioid-related deaths in Maine by 1,000 from current projections.

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"In the midst of this holiday season, we mourn those whom we've lost to the disease of addiction and re-commit ourselves as the medical professionals of our state — the nursing, physician, physician assistant, behavioral health practitioner, and all others — to respond to the severe public health threat of opioid use disorder."

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those whom we've lost to the disease of addiction and re-commit ourselves as the medical professionals of our state — the nursing, physician, physician assistant, behavioral health practitioner, and

all others — to respond to the severe public health threat of opioid use disorder," said Dr. Paul Cain, president of the Maine Medical Association, in a news release.

The campaign seeks to

prevent opioid use disorder deaths by implementing a set of health care site- and clinician-specific interventions to improve the treatment of substance use disorders, with particular attention to improv-

ing treatment for opioid use disorder. The interventions will be chosen based on their ability to reduce deaths.

This campaign will be led by Maine's physician and other clinician leadership, partnering with the state of Maine, opioid treatment providers, outpatient and residential treatment centers, and other many other key stakeholders.

Health care organizations and clinicians will assume the leadership role that this effort requires, and take the lead in convincing health care organizations and clinicians to sign on to these increased efforts.

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seeing them happy... being able to help people that are unable to help themselves."

She says she understands because she has an older mother back in Nigeria. You can tell by listening to both women that they care deeply about the people they care for and the careers they have.

A typical day for Juwah begins with administering medications, then getting the people she cares for ready for bed, making sure they are clean and dry. "I know it's a little bit difficult, but it's something I just want to do," Juwah said. "I do it because I have to take care of them, it's what I get to do."

While they sleep, Juwah constantly monitors them and takes care of her administrative work — documenting everything she does for the people she supports. In the morning, Juwah bathes and changes them, prepares breakfast, administers medications, and then takes them to work.

Turnover is high in this field and DSPs have traditionally been underpaid, although that is changing. True said that in 26 years she's had 19 bosses and about 100 coworkers. She said people coming and going in the group home and staff turnover makes it easy to lose the momentum of what they do for the people they serve.

"When we come in to work, it's not a workday for our clients, it's their lives," True said. "So, if you're having a bad day at work and you feel like doing nothing, that's a day you wasted of their lives. So, making sure that peo-

ple understand that, that people get what we do, that we're not just here to keep them alive. We're here to give them the best life."

The COVID-19 pandemic was especially challenging for direct support professionals. Mandatory vaccinations turned people away, True recalled, leaving them short-staffed and the men and women who live in the group homes scared about what was going on.

"Our people were suffering because not only were they worried about what's going on, and we were so short-staffed, but then they couldn't go out to their programs," True said. "They couldn't go out and do their normal life, so they were stuck at home."

"I was scared initially," Juwah remembered, "but because of their attachments, because I know these people cannot help themselves. Now they need me more than they ever do." Juwah said she was determined to see the pandemic through. "I stayed with them, I took good care of them until everybody got better."

Both Juwah and True are part of the Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council established by the Maine Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. The goal is to bring workers together to create a collective voice to inform policymakers about the issues that are important to workers — issues like staffing, wages, benefits, and training.

True says being on the advisory council is an opportunity to give direct support professionals a voice. "Now it's time to advocate for staff," she said. "The best way to get more staff is to get us

more money, better benefits, and put the word out there that it's a nice job to do, and anyone can do it."

Passion plays a big role, True added. "Most people want to help others — they just don't know how. And they don't want to do it for pennies on the dollar, they want to get paid fairly to do this job, because it is challenging. Because not only is it personal care, there's behavioral issues, there's transportation, there's passive medications. You have their lives in your hands."

Juwah says the best part of her job starts when she walks into her group home, and she hears the people she supports call out her name. "They are so excited to see me, you know, the joy makes me happy. Then also being able to help those people, and then being able to know what they actually want, (to) listen to them, and then I'm able to, you know, give solutions to their problems. That makes me happy."

Job satisfaction comes in many different forms, and for providers like True and Juwah, seeing the people they care for accomplish something or do something they've never done before is rewarding itself.

"I had a guy, I went on a trip with him, and he wanted to go snorkeling," True started. "He's a fantastic swimmer, and we got out there, and it was far more challenging for him because the breathing, and the fins, and whatever," she recalled. "When he finally got out there and saw what they had put under the water for us to see, it was like he had won a million dollars."

Patience and persistence are also key skills. True explained how one person under her care was non-verbal and could not express himself. After working with him at length, explaining feelings and other issues, one day he came up to True and told her he was mad at a staff member.

"I had to go in the bathroom and cry for 15 minutes, because we had given him the ability to speak up for himself and (it) changed his life. From that moment on, his life went from trying to figure out how to tell us things to speaking non-stop, and it was amazing... I still have goosebumps to this day because it changed his life, you know, so we can change lives, we can truly make a difference. And that's what motivates me."

True calls herself a lifer but has no illusions of wanting to move into administration — she doesn't want to be the boss. "I have a good schedule, I have a lot of vacation time, so I can do the things that make me happy and still do the job that makes me happy," she concluded.

Juwah is in the early stages of her career, but says she has no plans to go anywhere. Instead, she said it has always been her dream to become a nurse — even if it means going back to school and working at the same time.

Her advice for anyone considering a career as a direct support professional is straightforward: "Patience, and of course, love. If you do not have love, you cannot give away what you don't have — you need love."

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FREE BUSINESS FINANCIAL FUNDAMENTALS CLASS TO BE HELD ONLINE

BAR HARBOR — A free online one-hour class aims to focus on financial fundamentals and give participants a tool that shows how to achieve profitability in a few clicks without complex math or troublesome spreadsheets.

Four Steps to Unlocking Profits in 2024, presented by College of the Atlantic in collaboration with Profit Decoder, is focused on helping small businesses thrive. The class is set for 11 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 9. To register, visit profitdecoder.com.

The class is part of Profit Decoder's Cultivating Community series, which gives entrepreneurs the tools and skills to succeed. COA and Profit Decoder want to give small business owners the knowledge and skills to understand their financials and counter the number one reason for small business failure — a lack of financial engagement.

"Small businesses from bakers to graphic designers make up the backbone of our communities, and without these local enterprises, our communities would cease to exist as they are," said Profit Decoder cofounder Jordan Motzkin, a 2010 graduate of COA, according to a news release from Rob Levin, COA director of communications. "Impacting each of these small businesses has a positive multiplier effect, including hiring employees, keeping Main Street active and improving rural community wellbeing."

The impact of these small businesses is immense, according to the Small Business Administration. In 2019, the SBA reports, small businesses accounted for two-thirds of net new jobs and 44% of economic activity. This is economic activity that stays in the local community, according to the American Independent Business Alliance, which says that local businesses generate four times the impact of chain stores. Every dollar spent in these businesses generates an additional \$1.43 in local spending, creating jobs and strengthening community infrastructure, the AIBA reports.

But being a small business is tough work. A study from the University of South Florida reports that 86% of small businesses don't review financial statements. This lack of financial engagement is the number one reason for small business failure.

"Business owners often feel overwhelmed, scared, and confused by accounting terminology. Owners can resort to guessing about critical decisions and hope all will be okay," Motzkin says. "Four Steps to Unlocking Profits in 2024 counters these issues by providing local business owners the tools and skills to prosper."

This program is being held in partnership with Profit Decoder as well as Mount Desert 365, Heart of Ellsworth, and UpStart Maine. Maine Community Foundation is sponsoring this program, and all participants receive a free Profit Decoder subscription for a year, a \$149 value.

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6:30 p.m. at the Franco Center. Mayor Carl Sheline and the new City Council and School Committee will be sworn into office, along with musical performances and addresses from elected officials and local religious leaders.