



Winter 2003-2004
Volume 1: Edition II

BFAIR Buzz

Newsletter of Berkshire Family And Individual Resources, Inc.

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“The changes are amazing,”

says Ethel Altiery, Residential Director for BFAIR. “I’ve seen people go from being unhappy with life, to being very happy with life.”

This life changing force that Altiery is speaking of, is Shared Living - one of a number of residential service options offered through BFAIR. In Shared Living, an individual with disabilities lives with a family, couple or single person. **“The individual is welcomed into a more traditional home and is afforded the opportunity to become a member of a family.”**

Richard Lopardo has been in Shared Living for nearly three years. “It changed really good,” Richard answered when asked how Shared Living has changed his life. “I like it over there.”

Richard has been welcomed into the family of Barbara and Frank Ruggles. He enjoys telling others about his new family and how he now has more brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews.

“I have more friends and family. I’m where I want to be,” he states. “It’s been like starting a family all over



Richard at home with his shared living provider

again,” says Barbara Ruggles, provider for Richard. **“He has brought us a lot of joy.”**

The whole Ruggles family has welcomed Richard into their lives. He enjoys visiting and playing cards with his family and singing karaoke to his favorite Johnny Cash songs for them. **“I put on songs that I smile to!” Richard claims.**

Barbara explains that when Richard first arrived he never wanted to come out of his room. She encouraged him to do so by reminding him that he was now a part of the family and that families spend time together. This encouragement worked. Now when her grown children come over to visit, Richard doesn’t want to come in off the porch where everyone has gathered, or for the visit to end.

Prior to Shared Living, Rich-

ard lived in a group home setting. People who knew him then state that he was a very different person than he is now. Richard preferred to keep to himself in his room, was fearful, and didn’t want to interact with others. He readily expressed his unhappiness by yelling at others, and refused to participate in outings or parties. Now, however, Richard is a regular at agency parties and functions and he enjoys visiting and interacting with people.

“Before, I was yelling and screaming and stuff, but not anymore I don’t!” Richard proudly states.

Richard enjoys regular vacations with the Ruggles, and

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A Message from the Executive Director

As we reach the end of the year, I am amazed by the myriad of events which transpired during the year as well as those occurring in the final month.

Perhaps the most important event took place early in the year and involved our principal funding source, the Department of Mental Retardation. Throughout the month of February, DMR's Quality Enhancement Survey Team (QUEST) conducted a review of the agency's programs. A two-year certification was presented at the conclusion of the review and the QUEST team offered numerous compliments regarding various facets of our services.



A few months later when spring finally appeared in the Berkshires, the agency applied for and was granted membership with the Northern Berkshire United Way. An important step in collaborating with other local non-profits, membership in NBUW is viewed as an essential partnership with each agency supporting the work of the other. The strength of our new relationship with NBUW was confirmed when at the conclusion of our fall campaign BFAIR, staff pledged over \$3,700.00 in support of the local charity.

In July, Arcadia Employment Services began a new endeavor, introducing the Northern Berkshire community to the BFAIR Bottle and Can Redemption Center. Located on the Curran Highway, the citizens of Northern Berkshire have responded to the Center, redeeming over 80,000 can and bottles over 4 weeks in October! The Redemption Center is well on the road to success while serving two important purposes, employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and for local citizens, a convenient location for recycling glass bottles and aluminum cans.

Over the last few months of the year, Board, staff, and family members have been participating in the development of a three-year strategic plan for the agency. This Strategic Planning Committee has worked diligently to formulate a strategic plan for the various aspects of the agency such as Programs, Facilities and Financial among others. Once complete, the plan will be introduced to all stakeholders over the first few months of the new year.

While not nearly complete, the above items capture a few of the significant happenings that occurred over the past twelve months. Many other important events took place, and can be attributed like those already mentioned to the hard work and dedication of our staff. One staff member in particular, John Silvano, Homelife Support Counselor, stood out amongst others for his long-standing efforts with the residents of North Street. In recognition of his work, John was presented with the prestigious George A. Crosby Award at our recent Employee Holiday Party. Therefore, I would like to thank John as well as BFAIR's one hundred and forty plus staff, Board volunteers, family members and the people we support for making 2003 a memorable year at BFAIR.

Have a safe and happy new year!



Rich Weisenflue, Executive Director

Dedication



Lawrence (Larry) Andrus

March 13, 1944 - November 30, 2003

Larry was a very loving man and touched the hearts of everyone who knew him. He always enjoyed spending time socializing with his peers as well as listening to music and singing. When Larry was at home he enjoyed playing his guitar for his friends. He had an excellent sense of humor and could always bring out the best in people; he would often let us know throughout the day that he was “the boss.” Larry also enjoyed watching football and baseball on television. He especially liked to root for the New York Giants and Boston Red Sox. Larry often carried his bag of books with him so that he could color or do “Homework”. Larry was a special person in every way and he will be missed and remembered by all who knew him.

Shared Living

Continued from front page...

during the summer months spends several days of every week at the family’s camp on Lake Champlain. He likes to sit around the campfire, go for boat rides on the lake (something his fears would not have allowed him to do before living with the Ruggles), visit camp neighbors, and lay on his back listening to the birds sing.

The positive changes that Richard has experienced are very similar to those experienced by other individuals in Shared Living. Richard is proud of the changes he has been able to make in his life and is happy to be an integral member of a family.

BFAIR currently supports fifteen people in Shared Living settings. Ethel Altiery notes that the consistency provided in Shared Living is often more than what can be provided in the best of residential homes. She states that it is in large part this consistency that enables individuals to experience positive growth in all aspects of their lives. Shared Living also allows a person to feel like they are part of a family, a feeling that many might not have previously experienced, and they are able to build deep, caring relationships. Many providers find it a very rewarding experience to watch a person grow and come out of their shell as he or she settles into family life.

Anyone interested in finding out more about Shared Living may contact Ethel Altiery, ext. 16, or Jen Gelinias, ext. 23, at BFAIR’s North Adams office, 413.664.9382.

Family Supports

On Saturday, November 22, nearly seventy people gathered at the Crowne Plaza in Pittsfield to hear Attorney Theresa Varnet present the keynote address at the *Effective Advocacy Across the Lifespan* conference. During her dynamic opening comments, Attorney Varnet urged families to unite and work together to affect change at the state and federal levels. She also stressed the importance of parents becoming educated about their children’s particular disabilities and capabilities. According to Varnet, an advocate cannot be effective unless they are armed with the proper ammunition, namely, the correct information. Berkshire Family And Individual Resources, Berkshire County ARC, and UCP co-sponsored the conference. Staff from these agencies led many breakout sessions in the morning and afternoon.

BFAIR Family Supports Explores Howe Caverns

Just as Christopher Columbus did in 1492, BFAIR Family Support Program decided to explore a bit in observance of Columbus Day, 2003. BFAIR staff and eighteen individuals descended upon Howe Caverns in Howe Caves, New York.

The group took advantage of the Holiday and went spelunking!

As they descended two hundred feet into the natural wonders below, the tour guide pointed to stalactites and stalagmites that emerged throughout the cave. It was explained that it takes a hundred years for these formations to grow a single inch. As the exploration continued, the group took a boat ride along an underground stream known as the Lake of Venus. After visiting Brides Alter, where each year many weddings take place, the group wove



through a maze known as Winding Way before returning to the surface. After exploring the chilly cave for several hours, a hot lunch at the Howe Caverns Restaurant was enjoyed by all. By the response of all who attended, this trip is one they hope to repeat in the future.



Day Habilitation

In keeping with the philosophy and mission of Berkshire Family and Individual Resources, a primary focus of the Day

Habilitation Center is to actively promote community involvement and connections, in doing so the program has been a very busy place over the past few months.



In October preparations began for an Open House/Arts and Crafts Sale to be held December 5th. All parents, guardians, and BFAIR employees were invited to attend. There were baked goods and arts and crafts for sale as well as refreshments for all those who came to visit the program.

In November a volunteer project was conducted to benefit the Louison House. BFAIR Day Habilitation members and staff contributed food items which enabled the residents of Louison House to prepare a wonderful Thanksgiving feast.



Day Habilitation members also volunteered to help make wreaths for the North Adams Regional Hospital Wreath Project during the third week of November. In addition to decorating wreaths for the hospital, the volunteers were able to decorate wreaths for display at the program.

On December 19th, members were also invited to attend an afternoon of great music and dancing at the Adams Senior Center, where they enjoyed a live performance by the Aladdins.

The latest volunteer effort to date is the Ink and Toner Project. Used ink cartridges are collected and returned for money to help fund future volunteer projects. Day Habilitation staffs' efforts to develop new and creative ways for individuals to volunteer in their community are ongoing. If anyone has ideas they would like to share, please contact Theresa Biagini at 413-664-6693.

2003 Special Olympics Annual Games

On Friday October 24, 2003, athletes from BFAIR hit the road for Special Olympics Annual Games held on Cape Cod. Athletes included Normand, Joanne, David, Shawn, Emmy, Charlie, Celia, and Doug. They participated in opening ceremonies held on the beautiful beachfront properties of the Sea Crest Resort and Convention Center. The ceremonies were highlighted by a spectacular sunset. At the dinner dance, the athletes enjoyed a delicious meal, won prizes, and sang Karaoke. Normand and Joanne were first to hit the dance floor—they certainly know how to get a party started! It was a wonderful chance for everyone to meet new people and to reacquaint with old friends from all parts of the state.



A few of the athletes donned costumes and joined in on the Halloween fun! A good time was had by all. On Saturday, the athletes traveled to the track field and competed in 25, 50, 100, and 400-meter speed walking events. Bronze, silver and gold medals were won. Great job everyone!!

If you are interested in participating in the next Special Olympics event—bowling in Pittsfield sponsored by Civitan this February—please contact Jennifer Gelinias at 413.664.4911 x23. A special thanks to Jennifer Gelinias, Peg Pysar, Kristine Fierro, Valerie Tracy, Amy Borgnesser, and Jim Sulzman who accompanied the athletes!

Arcadia Employment Services

Spotlight Bob Sartori was recognized by his employer, North Adams Big Y, for his participation in the Annual Fall Foliage Parade held in October. Bob, who is a seven-year employee at Big Y, received a certificate of recognition for his teamwork and character after marching with the Big Y banner during the parade. Bob was also recently asked to sit on the Big Y Safety Committee and has become a newly elected member of the BFAIR Human Rights Committee. Way to go Bob!



Help Wanted! Arcadia Employment needs your help finding jobs! At a recent job development training, Rick McAllister, Supported Employment Consultant, stressed that the most effective way to job develop is to use a non-formal network of talking to people you know about potential jobs. Remember, “*It’s not what you know, but who you know.*” So if you or anyone from your family knows of any job openings, please contact us! Also, we are looking for subcontracted work such as parts assembly or bulk mailing for individuals working in the BFAIR Transition Center. Please let us know if you have any connections in that department. You can contact Kristine Fierro at 413.664.4911 x21, Steve Burns at x19 or Deb DiDonna at x15 if you have any contact information you would like to pass along. Thank you for your help!

Redemption Center The BFAIR Redemption Center, run by Arcadia Employment, officially opened its doors in July and business has been booming ever since! If you know of any organization planning a bottle drive, please refer them to the BFAIR Redemption Center located at 420 Curran Highway, North Adams. Please remind everyone you know that we redeem for cash all Massachusetts cans and bottles. Donations are also graciously accepted. Contact Corey LaCasse at 413.664.6200.



Job Corner Congratulations to Joanne, Doug, and Amanda who were recently hired by Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort; to Andy and Margaret who started new jobs at TJMaxx and to Charlie, May and Eric who now work at Pittsfield Animal Hospital/Shaker Pet Resort!

Residential Life.....Shawn Murray Reaches for the Stars

We all have things we would like to accomplish in our lives. We all have thoughts and ideas of the way we would like our lives to be. Well, this year, Shawn Murray successfully completed one of his long time goals. His goal was to skydive.



On October 18th, Shawn and John Silvano, BFAIR Home Life Support Counselor, went to North Hampton Municipal Airport. They attended an hour and a half long class that demonstrated the correct landing techniques and then they jumped from a plane at nine thousand feet. Amazing...

Shawn said it wasn’t scary at all. He said it felt good, with the wind pushing on him. He had a great time, and it felt like he was moving very slowly. Shawn also said he wasn’t thinking about much during the jump, just enjoying the gorgeous view. He would like to go for another tandem jump in the springtime, hopefully with John again. The entire jump is captured on video and in pictures, so he will have the memory fresh in his mind forever.

BFAIR is very proud of both Shawn and John; of Shawn for accomplishing his goal and trying new things and of John for setting aside his fears in order to help Shawn reach for the stars.

BFAIR Celebrates!

Who is in the mood to party you ask?.... The folks at BFAIR certainly were throughout the 2003 holiday season. The Lakeside restaurant drew a record breaking crowd on October 24th, with people from all parts of Berkshire County gathering to celebrate Halloween. The costumes were ghoulishly outstanding and a howling good time was had by all. The celebrations continued at the Day Habilitation Center with an October 31st Halloween party, and an "everyone gets involved" Thanksgiving feast on November 26th. This series of festivities culminated with a festive holiday celebration on December 23th. Opportunities to celebrate were not scarce as people from the Family and Individual Supports Program partied in style on December 13th at the Holy Family Church in Pittsfield – a longstanding and much anticipated

tradition. Not to be outdone, North Adams hosted two December holiday get-togethers, both at the Steeples restaurant. Music was provided by DJ Cory LaCasse at the very elegant but rockin holiday party for individuals and by DJ Mark Denning at the annual employee party. Congratulations John Silvano, the 2003 George Crosby Award Winner. John was honored with this prestigious award in an effort to recognize his commitment and contributions to the lives of the people he supports.



By all accounts we had best get ready..... people are already gearing up for 2004.....





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