



BFAIR Buzz

Spring 2004
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Newsletter of Berkshire Family And Individual Resources, Inc.

*Letter from the
Director*

Pg 2

*Remembering
Walter*

Pg 3

*Family and
Individual
Supports*

Pg 3

*More Board
Members*

Pg 4

Residential Life

Pg 5

*Sensory
Integration*

Pg 5

*Salary Reserve
Initiative*

Pg 6

Meet Our Board of Directors...

A moment was taken to speak to our Board of Directors. When asked what they liked about serving as a board member, this is what they had to say...



*Neil Giroux – Board Chairperson
and Attorney “It’s a good place to
give back!”*

Cathy Brechner – Vice Chairperson – Full-Time graduate student at Springfield College School of Social Work - “The most important thing that attracts me to being on the BFAIR Board is that 160 employees or so are providing a variety of quality services to the developmentally disabled and I can be a part of that. I also joined the Board to learn more about the workings of a board of directors. I have enjoyed building relationships with the Board members and am looking forward to working with more BFAIR staff.”



Darcy Fields – Director – Williamstown Branch Supervisor for BankNorth – “I have been looking to get more involved in the community and saw this as a great opportunity to do so. Since I have joined, I have really learned what BFAIR is all about and I think it’s a wonderful thing they do.”

*See Board of Directors
on page 4...*

A Message from the Executive Director



As spring in the Berkshires slowly emerges, the agency is also in the midst of a similar exciting transformation. The result of the hard work of numerous people, a new three-year strategic plan was recently approved for implementation by BFAIR's Board of Directors. The 2004-2006 Strategic plan will be shared with all stakeholders over the next few months and many thanks go out to the members of the Strategic Planning Committee which included representatives of BFAIR's Family Advisory Committee, an individual receiving services, numerous staff and Board members.

Planning is also underway for the agency's Annual Meeting. Scheduled for the early morning of April 23rd, the meeting will celebrate BFAIR's 10th Anniversary. The agenda will include the results of Board elections, staff recognition awards as well as a keynote address by a staff member from our principal funding source, the Department of Mental Retardation. Mark you calendars, invitations will be mailed shortly.

February and March are important months for human service agencies holding contracts with a state agency such as DMR. At first glance, the Governor's budget cuts DMR's Transportation and Day accounts by \$4.3 and \$12.1 million respectively. As a result, 798 individuals living either at home or on their own could lose both transportation and day services as of July 1. Additionally, DMR's Community Residential account has been cut by \$1.2 million thereby reducing by one half, the funding that is available for clinical services, potentially impacting 2400 individuals. In order to have our voice heard regarding the effect of these cuts and the on-going lack of cost of living increases to provider rates, BFAIR is participating with 11 other local agencies in the hosting of a Legislative Breakfast. Several local legislators are scheduled to be present at the event which will be held on Friday, April 16th at the Berkshire Hills County Club. The Legislative Breakfast is held in conjunction with Disability Pride Day, which was held on March 13th at the Berkshire Mall.

On a sad note, you will notice this edition of the BFAIR Buzz is dedicated to the memory of Walter O'Dell. A resident of Elm Street and a member of our Day Habilitation program, Walter was a familiar face around BFAIR for many years. Walter will be remembered fondly for many things, not the least of which being his spirit and ability to persevere in the face of numerous challenges. Many staff deserve credit for the care they provided to Walter throughout his illness, especially the staff of Elm Street who comforted Walter at home during his final days.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rich Weisenflue". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Rich Weisenflue, Executive Director

Dedication

Walter O'Dell

July 31, 1964 - February 17, 2004



Walter O'Dell was a very caring man and a good friend to all those who knew him. He was a handsome man who, even though small in stature, was big in heart. Walter had a way of always making his presence known when he was in the room. He had his own special way of communicating and readily made people laugh with his witty signs and sound effects. He would say hello and goodbye and called people he was fond of "Buddy". Walter enjoyed sitting on a mat and holding a towel for sensory input throughout his day. Walter loved the outdoors, especially when the weather was warm. He frequently picnicked at Windsor Lake and liked to go for walks on Ashuwillticook Rail Trail or spend relaxing time in his backyard. Walter also loved a good party and would never pass on a chance to join in on some fun. Walter fought hard in his life and came back to us twice. He was a terrific guy who touched the lives of many people in his time on earth. He will always be remembered and all who knew him will cherish his memory.

Family Supports - Family Advisory Council

Over the past seven years, BFAIR has looked to its Family Advisory Council for input into the operation of the Individual and Family Support Program. A Family Advocate guides the Council, and its membership is comprised of family members of people who receive supports. The purpose of the Council is multi-faceted and includes: advising administration on matters important to families, providing feedback on services, giving opinions on areas in need of additional services, facilitating projects of special interest to families, providing input on programmatic decisions, and offering information and training for Futures Planning for the individuals and their families. Most recently, BFAIR's Administration welcomed participation from the Advisory Council when embarking on its strategic planning process.

The Council is active in legislative advocacy and holds annual meetings with both local representatives and legislators from Boston. Through the years, Council members have participated in many events at the State House and have also met with representatives of the Department of Mental Retardation to discuss budget and service concerns. Notably, two years ago the BFAIR Family Advisory Council received the endorsement of Uniting Families for Change to represent UFC throughout Berkshire County.

The Advisory Council's contribution to BFAIR's Administration, individuals receiving support, and family members continues to be invaluable. In turn, Council members find participation to be an empowering and rewarding experience by assisting BFAIR in providing a complete range of quality services. It's truly a WIN - WIN situation when everyone is on the same team!

The Council has had the pleasure of seeing some individuals move through a continuum of services and life transitions which has led them to living more independent and productive lives. The Family Advisory Council believes it is now time to expand its scope, and benefit from the knowledge and experience of families who receive vocational and/or residential supports from BFAIR throughout Berkshire County. To this end, the Advisory Council will soon be hosting an open house and informational meeting. Information regarding the date, time and place of the meeting will be forthcoming.

Board of Directors



Antoinette Hawke – Director – Substitute Teacher – “I am a parent [of an individual with disabilities] and an advocate for people with disabilities. I also substitute teach in special education classrooms, so I am very interested in the work that BFAIR does.”

Stephen Greenberg – Director – Psychiatrist in Bennington, Vt. Area – “I enjoy working with others and providing my expertise to support and help grow community based programs such as BFAIR.”



Renee Tassone – Director – Sales Executive, Boxcarmedia – “ I love to sit on the Board because I enjoy giving back to the community and feel it [BFAIR] is a great agency to do it through.”

Eugene Messenger – Director – Dentist – Enjoys the opportunity to support people who need assistance to become more independent in their lives.



Thomas J. Pelkey – Board Treasurer – Software Consultant – Enjoys the chance to serve an agency that supports those with disabilities.

Richard Gerlach - Director -Retired “I am lucky to be a member of BFAIR’s Board of Directors because I have a son who is a recipient of BFAIR’s many services.”

Sensory Integration Takes Hold at Day Habilitation

It was a little over a year ago when the sensory integration/stimulation room was completed and made available to the members who attend the Day Habilitation program. Sensory integration is the neurological process that organizes sensations from one's body and the environment. This integration helps a person to be alert and adaptable, so one is able to function to the best of his/her abilities in one's environment.

The sensory room offers a quiet atmosphere with enchanting music and hands on therapy provided by the staff accompanying the individual to the room. The room is a great place for individuals to practice relaxation skills (deep breathing), receive a foot massage, or to look at the black light objects positioned about the room. When the individuals leave the room they are calmer and more organized.

Soon after the sensory room's implementation, the Occupational Therapist began to build on its effectiveness by developing sensory diets or activity menus for people to use throughout their day. A sensory diet is a defined approach to facilitate a person's interaction with sensory input. A diet can specifically assist a person to be more relaxed in their environment, allowing them greater ability to focus on goal work. These "diets" generally have a movement component and are made specific to each person and their level of input necessary to maintain sensory processing.

Since its inception in December of 2002, at least 10 individuals at the program make use of the room and the diets in addition to their regular day of programming. The sensory room has become a positive part of the Day Habilitation program and has assisted the progress of several individuals toward the achievement of their goals. We will continue to offer these services to an expanding number of individuals and are encouraged by the demonstrated successes thus far.

Residential Life.....



Look who's back in school!.... For several years, Jeff Hctor has had a longing to continue his education by improving his reading and math skills. This year he has been afforded the opportunity to do so.

In January, Jeff began Adult Basic Education Classes (ABE) at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. He attends class every Tuesday and Thursday and is proud to be a student again.

Initially, even though he had a strong desire to be back in school, Jeff was somewhat uncertain of what it would be like, but soon after attending a few classes, his uncertainty was laid to rest and Jeff reports that he really enjoys being back in school. He states that going to school helps him to feel good about himself. The classes are small, and Jeff appreciates how much the teachers are available to help him.

Jeff also enjoys the social opportunities that going to school have to offer. He welcomes the opportunity of meeting new people and developing new friendships. He frequently visits campus bulletin boards to find out about events and happenings in the community.

Jeff states that he loves his classes, "and I plan on going for a long, long time."

If anyone is interested in ABE classes, they may call 413-662-5314 for more information.



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Restore the Salary Reserve

The Massachusetts Council of Human Service Providers has sponsored a bill to establish a Salary Reserve for Human Service Worker's earning \$40,000 and under within the State EOHHS Purchase of Service System. If passed, the bill would increase Direct Care worker's earnings by 9.8% incrementally over a three-year period as directed by the legislature.

If interested in supporting the Salary Reserve Initiative, you can do so easily by logging onto www.providers.org, and clicking on the [GiveVoice](#) icon. Once there scroll down and click on [Restore Direct Care Reserve 03/23/04](#) and fill in your information to e-mail the sample letter to our legislators. Your involvement is vital in helping this important initiative pass!

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