



BFAIR Buzz

Summer 2005

Newsletter of Berkshire Family And Individual Resources, Inc.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

In the fall of 2004, BFAIR's senior administrative team gathered with consultant Geoff Nadar to craft a new vision and mission statement for the agency. After multiple sessions designed to examine why we serve, who we serve, what our past has taught us and where we want to go in the future, the team was inspired and energized to create something that the entire BFAIR community could be proud of. There was a strong desire to marry a visual representation reflecting the spirit of the agency with words that conveyed the same sentiment. Once the initial work group had a solid, defined direction, the full management team was brought into the process to review the prototype and make recommendations.

Finally at BFAIR's 10th Anniversary Annual Spring Meeting, to a room full of friends and community partners, the new BFAIR vision and mission statements were formally unveiled. The goal to create something that individuals, employees and families of BFAIR could reflect on while making decisions in

their day to day lives, as well as in planning for the future, had been realized.

Throughout the new administrative offices, in the Day Habilitation center and in the BFAIR Redemption center visitors and friends alike will find the new vision and mission statements framed

and displayed – representing how proud we are of the work we do how seriously we take the message conveyed in the text.

Please take a moment to read and enjoy BFAIR's new Mission and Vision statements. We look forward to your feedback.

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BFAIR
Berkshire Family And Individual Resources, Inc.

Respectful of the Past...
Passionate About the Present...
Committed to the Promise of the Future...

BELIEVING IN...

- The Value of All People
- The Power of Partnership
- Challenging the Status Quo
- The Exploration of All Dreams
- Compassionate, Responsible Decision Making
- Taking Pride in All We Do

Our Mission

Through organizational resolve, skilled and dedicated staff, and dynamic leadership, BFAIR provides quality services, advocacy and education for people with disabilities which affirm the rights of full inclusion, diversity, and well-being.

A Message from the Executive Director



As we at BFAIR step back from the first half of 2005, a period filled with exciting events and activities, it seems an apt time to reflect and offer thanks to all of the people who helped make it yet another positive chapter in the history of the agency.

BFAIR's senior staff and its volunteer Board of Directors, led by Chairperson Attorney Neil Giroux, certainly deserve a word of thanks for their efforts in planning and hosting in early spring, the corporation's Annual Meeting. Numerous employees and people were recognized at this year's event and those in attendance were treated to an interesting keynote presentation offered by Dr. Thomas Zane. Our early morning celebration of a decade of providing services for people with disabilities is chronicled within this edition of the "Buzz."

Moving ahead, the Department of Mental Retardation's Quality Enhancement Survey Team arrived at our doorstep prepared to assess the quality of our services. The agency was awarded a two-year certification, testimony to the efforts of all BFAIR employees and volunteers who join us in our pursuit of continuous quality improvement. Enough cannot be said about the efforts of staff at all levels throughout the organization who either provide the direction or practice a person-centered approach. Additionally, I extend a warm thank you to the members of DMR's survey team for their willingness to dialogue and offer us examples of best practices which will undoubtedly help us refine our array of services.

Behind the scenes, plans were established to relocate our administrative offices and day habilitation center from their former locations to our new space at 771 South Church Street. By no means a simple undertaking, very careful planning and activity (packing) on behalf of administrative and program staff led to a seamless transition to our new home. Shortly thereafter, family members, friends, partners and the public were invited to tour our wonderful new facility. An open invitation to the North Berkshire community led to a terrific evening which will not soon be forgotten.

While accomplishments such as those mentioned deserve ample recognition and strong words of praise for those involved, across the Commonwealth human service agencies feel the strain of the rising cost of health care insurance and wage issues for our employees brought on years of the lack of a cost of living adjustment. Both contribute dramatically to unmanageable staff vacancy rates and a struggle to maintain staff that believe in their work, but find greater pay for work elsewhere. And so we call on all of our stakeholders and ask that they take a moment and contact their legislators to advocate for state budgets which support the good work of so many.

Sincerely



Rich Weisenflue, Executive Director

Shared Living



The term 'Shared Living' is often misunderstood. Many people do not yet understand essential information about this residential model or fully understand its value. According to the Shared Living Conference Website:

Shared Living is a highly individualized home-care model for people of any age and disability; in which individuals choose where they live and who provides the support. Shared living can also be referred to as "family care," "adult foster care," "specialized home care," and "life sharing."

People living in a shared living arrangement enjoy a family or housemate environment like most other people in the community; supports are provided by fewer people and are, therefore, more uniform and consistent. There are examples in our community of shared living arrangements lasting 10, 20 or more years. Often individuals choosing this style of living become fully integrated into the environment they have come to call "home."

BFAIR is committed to the Shared Living model whenever the person served and his or her team deem it the preferable way to deliver residential support. In future Newsletters, we hope to continue to bring you the many success stories we have to share from our 19 current Shared Living arrangements.

QUEST Results

BFAIR Receives Two-Year Certification

Berkshire Family And Individual Resources, Inc. (BFAIR) was recently awarded a two-year certification by the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR).

The two-year level of certification was awarded as a result of BFAIR's successful participation in a survey and certification process conducted by DMR's Office of Quality Enhancement. BFAIR's strong commitment to quality services and efforts to enhance the lives of people with disabilities was recognized throughout the survey.

The Provider Report depicts the agency as committed to continuous quality improvement as evidenced by the establishment of a Quality Assurance Specialist position, the development of a Senior Level Human Rights Officer, the creation of an inter-departmental training committee, site manuals for all locations, as well as the operation of a successful redemption center serving the local community. BFAIR is portrayed in the report as an agency committed to autonomy and individual control with an effective values-based philosophy demonstrated through respectful and dignified interactions. Choice, decision-making, capitalizing on learning opportunities, skill development and personal-growth all contributed to a positive assessment of BFAIR's services by the Quality Enhancement Team.

Integration of resources, thoughtful planning efforts, continual organizational development and a three year strategic plan have all positioned the organization optimally to remain strong in this challenging human service environment.

Annual Meeting

On April 29th 2005, the agency held its second annual meeting celebrating 10 years of service. Recognition awards included:



Lisa L receives the Self-Determination Award



Lori Martin receives the George A. Crosby Award



Quintal Award winner Terry Blair



BFAIR employees receiving recognition for 15 years of service



BFAIR President and Board Chair Attorney Neil Giroux addresses the audience



BFAIR employees receiving recognition for 5 years of service



Keynote speaker Dr. Thomas Zane

Reports From Around The Agency

It's a Clinical Thing

The Clinical Department has entered a fresh era, marked by the creation of a new and highly energized clinical lineup. As the BFAIR community welcomed the onset of summer we also welcomed Aimee Erskine as Clinical Director and Jeff Johnson as Senior Behavior Specialist. Having once worked for BFAIR, Aimee returned to oversee the agency's clinical department serving both children and adults. Aimee is a Board Certified Associate Behavior Analyst specializing in the application of the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis and we are fortunate to have her back. Her new clinical partner, Jeff Johnson, joined the BFAIR team in early June. Jeff has worked for a number of years with people of varying age, disability and need - successfully providing structured and thoughtful clinical services and supports. With Aimee and Jeff on board the department is poised and at the ready to usher BFAIR into a new era of clinical support services.

Day Habilitation

During the month of April the Day Habilitation Center moved from its former location on the Curran Highway to BFAIR's new setting on South Church Street combining administrative offices and day programming under one roof. Individuals and staff alike are enjoying the new space and it has proven to be an excellent environment for learning. Additionally, people continue to be involved in many volunteer activities such as baking and delivering bread to the Louison House in Adams, grocery shopping for the Adams Council on Aging, hanging posters for concerts sponsored by the Hilltown Folk and cleanup at the Adopt-A-Site in Hancock. People attending the Day Hab Center continue to enjoy an array of in-house and community-based activities offered daily.

Residential

Ethel Altieri, former Director of Residential Services, has been promoted to the position of Adult Services Director. Congratulations Ethel! We wish to welcome Beth Arena, Shared Living Coordinator, Debra Weeden, Multi-Site Residential Coordinator and Simon Dembitzer, the new Director of Residential Services.

There have been several events worth celebrating over the last few months. As you will read on page (6), On June 3rd, Elmer H. graduated from Drury High School. Priscilla and Joanne have both experienced new Shared Living arrangements, and are doing very well. Chris and Bill moved into a more independent living arrangement on North Street, North Adams; congratulations to both of them. Additionally, a number of people have moved into more personalized living situations.

Arcadia Employment Services

Exciting news! The BFAIR Redemption Center and Vocational Transition Center recently relocated to the former Day Habilitation Center on Curran Highway in North Adams. This move has given the Redemption Center the additional space needed to establish an attractive customer service area, bottle sorting areas and adequate storage facilities. Twelve individuals are currently employed at the Redemption Center and participate in a number of tasks which include customer service, sorting, loading finished products into the storage facilities and various custodial duties. The Vocational Transition Center now consists of two areas designed and utilized for vocational skills education.

Individual and Family Supports

On April 16, 2005, Individual and Family Support longtime employees John Arasimowicz and Carmen Gustavis hosted our annual "Birthday Bash." This event was held at the Holy Family Church in Pittsfield and was attended by forty people. After lunch, attendees danced the afternoon away to music provided by D.J. Barry.

On May 10, 2005, the Self Advocates known as "BAG" (BFAIR Adult Group) celebrated their 10th anniversary. The event was held at the Holy Family Church in Pittsfield and was attended by twenty-five family members and friends. During the event Bill Fuller, BFAIR Adult Group's President, presented a video on "Public Speaking." The group spent nearly a year making their video with their former group advisor, Larry Stalvey. After the presentation, Bruce Brewer, Regional DMR Coordinator of Self-Advocacy presented the group with a certificate of appreciation for "Exemplary Efforts and Contributions to Self-Advocacy."



*Front Row: James K., James C., Susan B.
Back Row: Bill Fuller, Lois Fuller
Advisor: Brett Benham*

Congratulations Elmer

“I’ve accomplished something I thought I could never do”



Elmer displaying a proud smile to go along with his hard-earned diploma

On June 3, 2005 Elmer H. did something that he believed at one time would be impossible; he graduated from Drury High School. “My Great Grandmother kept telling me that she wanted me to graduate,” Elmer remembers, “and I have finally accomplished something I thought I could never do.” Elmer is a bright 19 year old man who not only accomplished his dream of graduation, but in doing so, earned the respect from Drury High School faculty, staff, and fellow classmates for his many accomplishments. His achievement was obvious to all in attendance at the graduation when he received a *standing ovation* upon the presentation of his diploma. Elmer also received the “Choral Merit Award” and the “Senior Achievement Award”. Elmer expressed thanks to Mayor Barrett, his fellow classmates and to his teachers, when he gave his speech at his Senior Banquet. He is sad his high school days are over but is very

excited about his future. “It’s just amazing that so many people here love and support me,” Elmer said in closing.

Special Olympics

On June 17th BFAIR’s Special Olympics team once again hit the road for the Annual Summer Games held in Boston at Harvard University. Team members included Bill C, Dave M, Elmer H, Doug C, Celia I, Emmy S, Joanne P, Betsy H, and Charlie H. Upon arrival in Boston, the team decided to take a ride on the “T” into downtown Boston for a bit of sightseeing. With great anticipation the BFAIR contingent shopped in Quincy market for souvenirs and several dined at a well known downtown attraction— “Cheers.” On Saturday the athletes participated in both speed walking and running events as well as the softball throw. A variable medal harvest ensued as the participants brought home gold, silver or bronze! Way to go everyone! A special thanks to Peg Pysar, Brenda Hawkins, Valerie Tracy, Amy Bornguesser as well as Kristine McHale for her selfless coordination of this trip and numerous others. The next Special Olympics event will be bowling held this August in the Northampton area. All athletes who participated in the bowling qualifier in April are welcome to attend. If you are interested in volunteering to help or participating in the next Special Olympics event please contact Kristine McHale at 664-9382 x37.

Diversity At Bfair

At BFAIR, the term “diversity” represents a commitment to respecting individual differences. This includes such things as culture, age, appearance, disability, gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Since the addition of a third day of new staff orientation at the beginning of 2005, diversity training is now provided to all new employees. This training stresses the importance of cooperation, inclusion and sensitivity with an expectation of acceptance and open-mindedness to different practices, attitudes, and cultures. Through discussion, sensitivity exercises, small group work and role plays, BFAIR’s diversity training speaks to awareness of potential differences, the negative impact of non-inclusion and provides staff with tools for fostering an emotionally safe and accepting environment.

“Diversity transcends race and gender, affirmative action and Equal Employment Opportunity. It must encompass a fundamental appreciation of one another and a respect for both our similarities and our differences. It must include a heartfelt respect in attitude and in behavior towards those of different race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and those with disabilities. All the facets that make each individual the unique and precious resource that each of us is.”

Ronald Brown, Former Secretary of Commerce

Open House - 771 South Church Street

In April, friends, family members and the general public were invited to join agency staff in an "Open House" Celebration:



Lobby



Exterior



Front Desk/Reception



Attorney Neil Giroux, North Adams Housing Authority Executive Director Marlene Walsh and BFAIR Executive Director Rich Weisenflue



BFAIR Clinical Director Aimee Erskine and Senior Behavior Specialist Jeff Johnson



Rich Weisenflue, Marlene Walsh and Marie Harpin of the Northern Berkshire Community Action Council



Simon Dembitzer, Residential Director, Marlene Walsh and Jack Gould of the North Adams Housing Authority.



BFAIR Financial Systems Director, Jane Patenaude, Attorney Steve Narey of Donovan & O'Connor and Program Supervisor Kris Neep



Kristine McHale, BFAIR Developmental Specialist enjoys a chat at the buffet



Jean Noel and Peg Mekdeci representing Greylock Federal Credit Union



BFAIR, INC.
771 South Church Street
North Adams, MA 01247

Place
Postage
Here

Board of Directors:

Neil Giroux, *Board Chairperson*

Renee Tassone, *Vice Chairperson*

Peter West, *Treasurer*

Kate H. Merrigan, *Clerk*

Cathy Brechner, *Director*

Antoinette C. Hawke, *Director*

Mary Lou Acceta, *Director*

Rachel Dayton, *Director*

Ray Crafts, *Director*

Marion G. Royston, *Director*

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North Adams, MA
(413) 664-6200**

HOURS
M,W,F 9am-5pm
T,TH 9am-6:30pm
SAT 9am-1pm

www.bfair.org