



the **B**UZZ

Winter 2015

Newsletter of Berkshire Family And Individual Resources, Inc.



Arcadia Employment's Pittsfield Maintenance Team - Taking on a major raking project in the autumn sunshine at Camp Becket/Chimney Corners, Becket, MA.

Front row - left to right: Margaret, Eric, Amanda, Doris, Joe, Chris
Back row - left to right: Travis, Mike, Johnny

Inset: BFAIR staff with the Berkshire Battalion Hockey Team

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"A heartfelt thank you to all of our campaign donors - friends of the agency, family members, staff, volunteers and businesses for supporting BFAIR's mission. Through your generosity \$17,000 was raised. 100% of that money will directly benefit people with disabilities."

— Patti Messina, Campaign Chair

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Save the Date:

What: Annual Meeting

When: April 17th, 7:30 a.m.

Where: Williams Inn

Board Member Spotlight – Patti Messina

Patti Messina will tell you lots of reasons why to support BFAIR's Annual Campaign, which she oversees as a member of the agency's Board of Directors.

Gifts support an agency with a 20-year history taking on new challenges to meet the changing needs of our community. BFAIR maintains National Accreditation and is licensed by the state of Massachusetts. One hundred percent of donations goes directly to people served by BFAIR. Gifts are tax deductible and support residents of the Berkshire community. But for Messina, it's more than that. It's personal. Messina's brother, David, has been served by BFAIR for 14 years. Seeing him smile and succeed has driven her desire to help BFAIR thrive as it enters its third decade of serving Berkshire County.

"There wasn't a program like BFAIR when David was born," Messina said. "It was primarily a group of families supporting each other. Now that our parents are no longer here, it's important to me and the rest of our family to be as conscious of David's care and happiness."

"I've seen David change from someone who would just sit, watch TV and listen to music, become so much more involved and active, with his job, friends, and activities," she continued. "BFAIR, David's second family, has been there to help him from grief to all the extra care when he was hospitalized."

For Messina, spearheading the campaign, which kicked off December 1st and runs through the end of February, is all about making a difference in the lives of the developmentally challenged individuals that BFAIR serves. "Being a part of BFAIR helps me to give back," she said.



Board Clerk and Family Member Patti Messina enjoying a BFAIR event with her brother David

Making a difference in David's life is even more important. Messina posted a picture on her Facebook page of her and David dancing at the BFAIR holiday party for individuals in early December and wrote the following comment underneath: "David had a blast. We danced to Cupid Shuffle, Electric Slide, Old Time Rock and Roll... and kept on going! He wasn't able to do that for two years. So much fun!"

According to Dave Robbins BFAIR Board Chair and President, "I have known Patti for several years now, she is an amazing person with a huge heart. She not only has a personal connection to BFAIR, with

her brother David, but she really cares about BFAIR as a whole and puts all of her energy into the organization. Patti has taken the Annual Campaign into its 3rd year and is a huge reason for its success. She is a remarkable motivator and someone that puts 110% effort into everything she does. I can't thank Patti enough for the work that she's done and the work that she continues to do as a member of the BFAIR Board of Directors and as the Chair of the Annual Campaign. All I can say is that we are very grateful she decided to serve on BFAIR's Board and we hope to have her for many years to come, she's an inspiration to us all."

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— Dave Robbins, BFAIR Board Chair & President

BFAIR Hosts REST Training for Caregivers



Caregivers and would-be caregivers participate in an interactive and educational training program to acquire the tools necessary to be successful providing respite care.

Caregivers do so much for the people they have pledged to protect. But who protects caregivers when they face their own stress and illness?

The Lifespan Respite Care Program, approved by Congress in 2006, was a giant national step in answering that question. On a state level, the Massachusetts Lifespan Respite Coalition (MLRC) was created in 2010 to give residents access to respite care options. In the Berkshires, BFAIR has been a leading force in raising awareness of the needs of caregivers and training those who can help them.

Gail Oberst, BFAIR's AFC Director (Adult Family Care), recently helped organize the REST training right in the BFAIR office that drew nearly 30 people. She worked with the MLRC, which originally was offering training in the eastern part of the

state and convinced them to bring the training to the Berkshires, as well.

"Gail is always looking for ways to expand our partnerships with other vendors and the community at large," said Associate Executive Director Ethel Altiery. "Gail understands the caregiver's role and the resulting stress that may occur and constantly looks for ways to support them."

Indeed, that has been a huge goal since Oberst joined the BFAIR team three years ago. "I was looking for ways to increase our respite base. We know it's a huge need here," Oberst said.

The MLRC sponsored full-day training provided manuals to hand out to participants, aimed at both current caregivers and potential respite workers, as well as lunch for attendees.

"MLRC trainers Joan Rafferty and Linda Ungerleider offered a wonderful overview

on how to care for people with a range of disabilities," Oberst said.

And because many of the participants were current caregivers, Oberst turned to staffer Jasmine Rivera, AFC Case Manager, to provide on-site respite for a group of individuals ranging in age from 20 to 76, while the caregivers completed the training.

"They were a good group. They all mingled well together," Rivera said. "I was able to give the caregivers the relief they needed to attend the training. They were comfortable because they knew everything was under control."

Rivera also was available to translate some of the training into Spanish, including some of the forms given to participants to provide respite workers with more information about the individuals they will be caring for, like favorite foods.

Family members do not think of themselves as caregivers needing respite. They look at caregiving as part of their responsibilities to family members. Across cultures, this is the case. Caregivers often say, 'Oh, no, we don't need a break.'

And that's why Oberst thinks the need for more awareness and training is clear - and she is dedicated to building on the success of this training to reach out to more people by sharing the information with other agencies and looking into planning other trainings.

"There is a ripple effect," she said, adding that the MLRC folks want to continue to work with BFAIR, too. "They want to continue connecting with us. They were happy with the variety of people who attended."

That's important in bringing BFAIR and its mission more into the mind of the community. "Part of our mission is not just to serve ourselves," she said. "It's to broaden community awareness and education."

BFAIR Partners with MCLA on Clinical Internship Program



MCLA student intern Danielle Sylvester (center) with BFAIR clinical staff, Brett Goodermote and Julia Phykitt

When it comes to preparing for life after college, there's nothing better than first-hand experience during college.

Eric Denette, BFAIR's Clinical Director, plays a key role coordinating the work of interns. "I always look forward to working with interns from MCLA. Those who have come our way are motivated to gain real life experience and that is exactly what we give them. It's incredibly important to provide our interns with an enriching experience by working directly with our staff and the people we support."

Eric added, "It's not simply about office duties and what they can do to help the clinical team. It's more about how we can help them experience what a job in the field of Applied Behavior Analysis would look like. Feedback from interns about their experiences is always positive and it's wonderful to watch them assist

with Functional Behavior Assessments, collection and presentation of data and ultimately assisting in the creation of a Behavior Intervention Plan. As part of this experience they are required to present their assessments and their plan at a staff meeting with clinical staff support. It's a wonderful way to experience BFAIR's team process which is critical in this field."

That's what Danielle Sylvester, a senior at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, has found out while completing an internship with BFAIR this fall. She is the fourth intern with BFAIR's Clinical Department.

Danielle is majoring in psychology and with a minor in behavior analysis and child and family studies. Her semester at BFAIR, where she is working about 12 hours a week, is giving her knowledge and experience after she graduates in the spring and launches a career.

"I hope to do what I'm doing here," she

said. "I'm trying to just learn everything about the field."

And what exactly is she doing at BFAIR this fall? According to BFAIR Behavior Specialist Julia Phykitt, Danielle is working on a new assessment for an individual with a challenging history. Completing the assessment requires observation of the individual, conversations with staff and, perhaps most importantly, personal interaction with the individual. That's where Danielle has seen the biggest benefit to the internship. "What we read is just scenarios," she said. "I wanted to do it just to get the experience."

Brett Goodermote, Behavioral Specialist, echoed the idea of first-hand knowledge versus book knowledge. "You can read it but experiencing it is so much better," he said.

What's definitely better for both Brett and Julia is that Danielle "hit the ground running" when she started and was working independently very quickly. "She caught on really quickly," Julia said. "I know I can turn this over to her and feel good about it," Brett said.

Brett added that Danielle's speed will help broaden her experience in a different way. If it took her the whole semester to complete the assessment, she would not be able to see the implementation of her plan. Because she has been able work quickly at completing the assessment, she will be able to see some follow-up. "You get to see how your work paid off," he said.

Danielle said she is happy to have helped the individual, BFAIR and herself as she completes her schooling. "I didn't know what to expect when I first came in," she said. "I'm really thankful to have had this opportunity."

Christopher McClendon: A Shining Star

When Christopher McClendon feels the beat, he can't help but grooving to it, even if he is at work at the Northern Berkshire Container Redemption Center.

And that's totally fine with Gretchen Thomas, who supervises Christopher while he sorts cans, pulls tabs and, yes, occasionally dances around the Massachusetts Avenue facility.

"We just let him go," she said. "If I could only bottle his energy."

It wasn't always like that for Christopher, an individual with autism who has been served by BFAIR for several years. Missy Robare, a Day Habilitation program specialist and Christopher's case manager, said when Christopher came to BFAIR he struggled in some areas, such as expressing himself and dealing with frustration and maintain self-control." According to his one-on-one staff person, Dave Baumbach, all of that has changed.

"In addition to attending the Day Hab he now has a job and receives employment supports from BFAIR's employment program Arcadia Employment Services. He's able to articulate his feelings," Robare said. "He's just come so far since he began attending our Day Hab program."

His latest victory has been increasing his work time at the redemption center from one hour three times a week to an hour and a half a day five days a week, with the goal of eventually going full-time. Christopher said he was happy with that move. "It's fun. I like to be there half an hour more," he said.

What are some other things Christopher likes? Sports is a big one. "I do like the Patriots," he said. "I like the Red Sox."

He also likes watching NASCAR on television and playing basketball in person with Dave, swimming and lifting weights at the YMCA - sometimes with a double dose of sports. "We watch Sports Center sometimes," he said.

Also in his spare time, Christopher likes to cook and watch shows like "Chopped" on Food Network. He was proud of spending his first paycheck to buy a humidifier and planned on going Holiday shopping soon at the Holyoke Mall.

That's a big step for an individual who's community activities were limited when he first came to BFAIR. What does Robare attribute Christopher's success to? The BFAIR team that has worked with him over the years. "It's a team effort," she said. "Trust, communication and consistency are really the biggest three."

It helps that Christopher is a naturally funny, compassionate and likeable guy, according to the BFAIR staffers who work with him. Thomas, who said Christopher has "a great sense of humor," recalled a



Having made great strides since attending BFAIR's Day Habilitation program Christopher now also works part-time at the Redemption center managed by Arcadia Employment Services

time when he had her in stitches with his dancing and other antics at the redemption center. "He had me in tears," she said Christopher immediately asked her why she was crying. Her reply? "These are happy tears, Chris."

Christopher with BFAIR Day Hab Specialist Susan Brooks prepare for AYC fundraiser.



BFAIR Staff Wellness Program

T rue North Insurance Agency and True North Financial Services were the proud sponsors of the third fitness challenge organized by BFAIR for its employees. The six-week program at the Northern Berkshire YMCA paired 17 employees with Personal Trainer Steve Rondeau for weekly hour-long work-outs.

Beth Petropulos, BFAIR's Human Resources Director, said healthy employees serve as strong role models for the people with disabilities they support.

"We want to engage and support employees. It also involves team building because we have staff participating in the six-week wellness programs from different departments. It's generated a lot of excitement," said Petropulos.

BFAIR Habilitation Specialist Katey Farrell, who lost weight as a result of the challenge, now works out five days a week and is training with co-worker Cindy Cavanaugh for the 10-mile Tough Mudder at Mt. Snow in June. "I just wanted to be healthy and this pushed me," said Farrell.



Holly Taylor, President, True North Insurance along with six of BFAIR's employees participating in BFAIR's third annual fitness program.

Cavanaugh lost significant weight over the past 18 months. Exercising and eating right, she said, is critical to maintaining her weight. The prospect of working out at a gym was intimidating for Cavanaugh, but going with a group of co-workers made a huge difference.

"It's great to have your co-workers cheering you on and supporting you," Cavanaugh said. "This is a lot of hard work and a whole new lifestyle for me. "

Holly Taylor, president of True North Insurance and BFAIR's employee benefits broker, was excited to sponsor the third challenge.

"I was so impressed with the success and enthusiasm from the first fitness challenge," said Taylor. "What better way to support BFAIR and its employees than through a wellness program that has a profound impact on the health of individuals."

BFAIR Staff Holiday Party

BFAIR's staff, friends and family members gathered for a holiday party. A terrific evening and a wonderful start to the new year and the agency's 20th anniversary celebration!





BFAIR, INC.
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BFAIR celebrates 20th Anniversary

As we embark on the new year, we are very excited to be celebrating our 20th Anniversary. The growth BFAIR has experienced over the past two decades wouldn't have been possible without support of our staff, the clients and families we serve, and the generosity of the our community.

Join us over the next several months as we celebrate our 20th year, looking back on how far we've come and looking ahead at new initiatives and enhancements.

Thanks for your continued support!



SAVE THE DATE: BFAIR's Annual Meeting — April 17th