

November 2008

Dear Diane,

Michelle transferred from another group home to HART in the early 1990's and it has been an answer to our prayers! What a blessing HART United, Inc. has been to the McCurry family. Michelle did well in her prior placement, however, she has grown so much over the years and she feels very happy and secure at HART. She loves her condo "mates" and the staff.

We love the "HART" family atmosphere. We've seen such independence and growth over the years. Michelle has so much self-confidence now. We know that Shelley's well-being will always be a priority with HART.

We also love the fact that HART's doors are always open for questions – or, if there is a problem, staff is always available with love and support.

Thank you so much for everything.

Sincerely,

Gerri and Mac McCurry

11/18/2008

Dear H.A.R.T. Supporters,

My sister Margaret, has been a member of the H.A.R.T. community for more than twelve years. Margaret considers "the condos" home with her house mates and staff as part of her extended family.

A spirit of community is fostered by the staff amongst the clients. Each client is treated with respect and given the assistance needed to live independently within their community.

Margaret has been blessed with a caring, supportive staff. The staff is always there to guide, advocate and help Margaret with her daily living. They encourage Margaret to participate in Special Olympics, adult social groups and condo events. With H.A.R.T.'s help Margaret lives an independent, well rounded life. My hope is that she can continue to be part of the H.A.R.T. community and flourish under H.A.R.T.'s care. Thank you for giving Margaret the opportunity to live such an independent and rewarding life.

Sincerely,

Mary Rose Corkindale

Shortly after moving to Connecticut from New York, my son, Donald, age three was diagnosed with autism. When he was 11, I was divorced. Life at home centered around Donald and the structured environment he needed. And because of his behavior in public, our life was "at home." It was just easier to avoid outside activities. .

Donald attended Foundation School from age three to 13 and graduated from ACES at 21. He spent summers and Saturdays afternoons at Camp Rainbow and later became involved in Special Olympics. Still, most of his life was spent "at home" pacing, uninvolved, frustrated and purposeless. There were locks on doors and windows to keep him safe and from wandering off.

His sister, Nancy, also had to learn Donald was the priority. We rarely attended events she was involved in. (*I remember sitting in the car with Donald when she played softball*). It was hard for her when friends made comments or fun of him, as it would be for any child. I am glad to see more attention is being paid now to the siblings of special needs children because it is so difficult for them.

The older he got, the harder it got. It is impossible to get a baby sitter for a difficult 16 year old. DMR was able to find before /after-work day care, so I could continue to work. And, that was what life came down to. It was a very sad situation for all of us with no light at the end of the tunnel.

That all changed when Donald was accepted into Lawrence Hall.

There was never any "separation anxiety" because I knew H.A.R.T. was the gold standard for group homes and it was wonderful to see how happy Donald was to be moving into Lawrence Hall. On his moving-in day, he was actually shoving me out the door to make sure I was not taking him back with me. I love to hear him say he wants to go "home" (Lawrence Hall).

Donald is not the easiest person to deal with, but the staff at Lawrence Hall always look for the positive in him and are there to guide him in the right direction. He was given the chance to grow to his fullest potential, even beyond my expectations. He learned to do his laundry/chores, take care of his needs, participate in preparing meals and even to use the telephone. He goes shopping, to movies, ball games, dances, parties and walks. This is, of course, was made possible by the quality of people who work at Lawrence Hall and H.A.R.T.

After almost 14 years, I still can't believe how lucky Donald and I are. I hope H.A.R.T. really knows all they have done for all of us. Donald now has a full and complete life and a second family. I have my life back and enjoy every minute. I also volunteer at St. Raphael's, am a member of the Hamden Woman's Club and the Town of Hamden Disabilities Committee.

Donald and I are just one story. H.A.R.T. should be very proud of the work they do and the incredible impact they have on the lives of others.

Annmarie McConville
January 2007