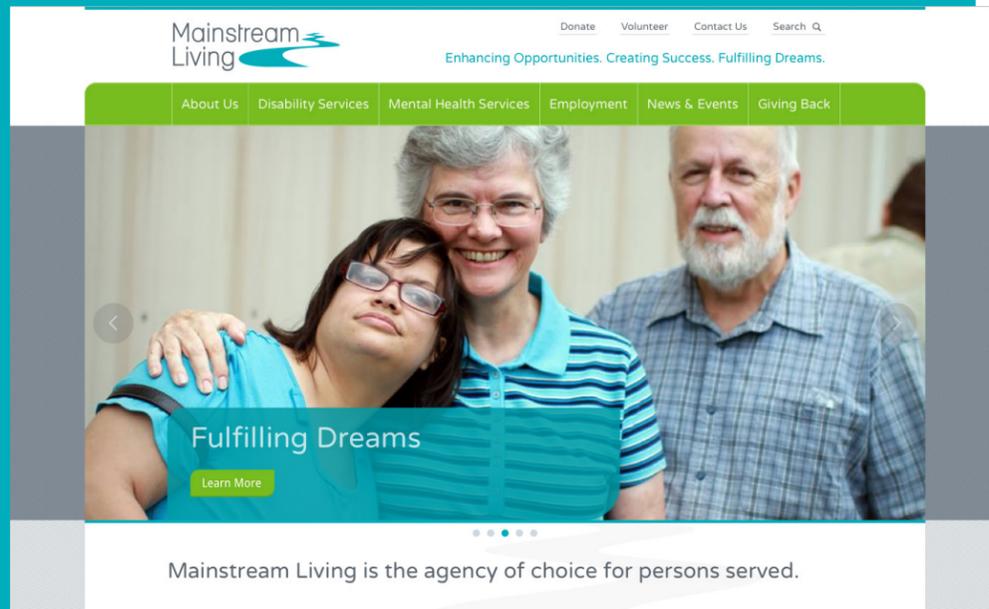


Visit our New Website

Mainstream Living has officially launched our new website. We're excited about all of the new features, and would like to invite you to take a look.

Please visit <http://www.mainstreamliving.org/>



Member Success Stories - A Turning Point



Lu Wingfield, Vice President of Mental Health

When I started at Mainstream Living, I was a young mom with a small child and flexibility was something that was very important to me. Working at Mainstream Living allowed me to have a flexible schedule, I was able to do things a lot of other parents didn't have the luxury of doing. I didn't ever have to miss a ballgame or school activity, which continues to be a great perk of my career.

Mainstream Living has become my second family. I have met (and continue to meet) some really great

people. People that are bright, committed, energetic and willing to work some long, hard hours to meet the needs of the people we support. My co-workers at Mainstream Living provide me with a home away from home, and they all continue to amaze me with their drive and passion to help others.

When I reflect on the mental health services that Mainstream Living has provided over the past 30 years, I am proud of the way that we have been able to adapt the services that we provide to meet the growing needs of the individuals we serve. We serve complex individuals with multiple occurring issues. Twenty years ago, we didn't have the capacity to do what we do today, and the improvements are continuing to evolve.

Agency staff has received a lot of great training as part of the Polk County Positive Behavior Support initiative. Those trainings, as well as other research into best practice, allowed us to create programs and accept individuals that we otherwise would not have been able to serve. The Transition Age Youth (TAY) program, which started in 2009, is one that would not have been possible prior to the trainings and industry research. This is the first program of this kind in the state of Iowa. TAY admits around 10 people each year, with an average stay of eight months.

One member's story has stayed with me and continues to remind me that given the right amount of support, hope and trust, people can do amazing things. Her family first recognized her mental health symptoms at 8 years old, but they were left undiagnosed until she reached fifth-grade and had her first psychiatric

hospitalization. For the next eight years, she was hospitalized numerous times for suicidal ideation and self-injurious behavior. She lived in 10 different placements until she came to Mainstream Living's TAY program.

For several months, she struggled to build trusting relationships with staff and her two roommates. As a method to cope, she would cut herself, often resulting in hospitalization. After various moves to different TAY sites, a meeting was held with her and her team to develop a support plan. She struggled to engage in this meeting, however she agreed with staff's recommendations. A detailed support plan was put into place but after weeks of running the new plan, she continued to struggle. At a subsequent meeting - her team realized that their assumptions about what was motivating her self-harm behavior was wrong -- she identified to them that asking for help was the largest obstacle to her recovery. With this new information, the support plan was modified.

This was a turning point. After a couple of years of focusing on how to ask for help, self-manage and identify her triggers, she has moved into her own apartment in Des Moines and is living on her own without staff support! This member reminds her peers, friends, family, and those who worked with her that sometimes life can cause you to stumble back a few steps, but you can push forward and make positive changes that will help you lead a great life.



Support Mainstream Living by shopping on Amazon Smile. A portion of your purchase will be donated to our organization.

#StartWithaSmile

Coming of Age with the ACE Program

When Marianne first started coming to the Center, she was uncomfortable opening up to others. Attending over summer breaks while still in high school, she was reeling from the all too common experience of people with intellectual disabilities at that age: bullying, social exclusion, and being made to feel inferior because of her disability. At an age when personal identity really becomes galvanized, Marianne was beginning to internalize the negative culture that surrounded her. "I put myself down," she says. "I would think 'I can't do things. I'm just a person with a disability.'"

For two summers, Marianne attended The Center on a daily basis, and she got a glimpse of life beyond high school. She began to settle in with a group of friends who could share her experiences, and with whom she could be less defensive. Although The Center was a welcoming place, it was not until the summer of 2013 that Marianne really found her niche as a founding member of the ACE Program. "ACE has shown me I can be who I am," she says unequivocally as she sits next to a row of oft-used computers within the ACE facility. "It's taught me a lot about who I am in this community."

Marianne was heavily involved with the initial planning phases for ACE, offering ideas for getting more involved in the community, as well as giving her input on the general structure of the program. In November of 2013, Marianne was one of the people at ACE on the opening day, eager to get things going. With staff encouragement, she was one of the first people to begin researching new activities, and e-mailing community members directly. Since then, she has never looked back.

"Marianne self-starts with planning activities," says Judy Schieffer, an activities coordinator at the ACE Program. "During activity planning, she always jumps right in and starts listing off things that she wants to do, or that others might want to do. She calls and sets up activities, volunteering tasks, and really everything." This initiative definitely doesn't go unnoticed, and members of the program recently awarded her with the monthly leadership award for all of her efforts.

Though Marianne has been able to plan many activities since starting ACE, the main transformative force in her life has



been the supportive culture of the program. "ACE has made me become more open to people," she says. "I've been a lot nicer, and I've been accepting new people in my life when I've been here." Though the scars of bullying may always be there, Marianne has found a place where she can be open and honest, and it has helped her to develop relationships that will last a lifetime. "I have awesome friends here," she says.

Recently, Marianne has gone on to do public advocacy work with ACE and other organizations such as ID Action, the Arc, Special Olympics, and an ISU student group. She has spoken on behalf of the "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign, and about her place as a person with a disability within the Ames community in several different forums. On May 5, Marianne will present at the Iowa Association of Community Providers' annual convention about the ACE Program, and how this model can be successful for other organizations.

Since she started with Mainstream Living, Marianne has transformed from a diffident teenager into an active participant in the community, and an advocate for social justice for people with intellectual disabilities. Though this is largely due to her own hard work and initiative, she credits the staff of Mainstream Living for giving her the push she needed. "People here tell me I can do it," she says. "They tell me to think about good things about me, and not the negative, because I am a nice, caring, honest person." Still in her early twenties, she now has a rich life to look forward to.

Mainstream Living is Hiring!

Enhancing Opportunities. Creating Success. Fulfilling Dreams.

Whether helping others has always been your calling or you're still considering your options, we invite you to learn more about our team, our culture, and being a part of something that we think is pretty awesome.

Seeking Independence



Wade moved to Des Moines with his mother about two years ago. Before moving to Des Moines, Wade was living with his mother and in a residential care facility in Utah. The two decided that they

wanted to move back to the midwest to be closer to friends and family. After looking at provider options in the area, Wade chose Mainstream Living in Des Moines. One thing that interested Wade about Mainstream Living was the idea of living with a smaller number of people. His ultimate goal is to live on his own with only hourly supports.

Since Wade has started with Mainstream Living, he has been learning how to cook, clean, and other important tasks that he will encounter when he lives on his own. Recently, with the support of one of his core staff persons, Tasha Villa, Wade came to the conclusion that he wanted to lose some weight. This goal combines a daily challenge of healthy eating choices and getting out each day to do some exercise. Wade has made a lot of progress with this goal, and since the beginning of winter he has lost 22 pounds. He is very proud of this accomplishment, and the daily choices he is making to lead a happier, healthier lifestyle. Wade is excited to continue progress on this goal, and very

happy with the major changes he has been making.

An area of life, that helps Wade maintain his focus on his goals is his passion for athletics. He is a huge sports fan, and has his own collection of professional sports apparel. He has either a t-shirt or sweatshirt, along with a matching hat of almost every Major League Baseball team and National Football League team. Wade is very excited for spring and summer because he plans to attend several Iowa Cubs baseball games. However, once summer is over, he will be ready for the upcoming college football season to begin. Whether he goes to an Iowa Hawkeye game, or an Iowa State Cyclone game he can't wait for the season. One thing Wade is also looking forward to this summer is checking out some local high school athletics games. Wade's passion for athletics keeps growing, and he appreciates having a hobby that he can continue to enjoy while working toward his ultimate goal of becoming more independent.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words



Mary Kate, an advocate for the Special Olympics, as well as the "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign gave a moving speech at a forum at Iowa State University. The speech can be found below. A video of Mary Kate's speech can also be found on the Facebook page "Students for Special Needs".

"Have you ever walked into the supermarket

looking for a can of chicken noodle soup, and come to find out there's 12 different brands to choose from? Is each soup different than the other? Or are they actually the same, but the packaging looks a little different on the outside? Sometimes I think people in our society find it difficult to relate to people with disabilities or who are different, because in a way, we are all like chicken noodle soup. Our packaging is different like each brand, but as chicken noodle soup comes, we all have the same broth, noodles and chicken. Retarded in the dictionary is defined as less advanced in mental, physical or social development usual for one's age. I am here today to tell you what the R word means to me and why I feel so strongly about it. I feel like so many people use it in their everyday vocabulary jokingly not realizing it's so hurtful, and can cause my friends and I so much pain. Hearing people

use the "R" word makes me sad. I see my friends feeling hurt not just physically but emotionally, because people are so cruel and mean when they use that word. When I was in middle school I felt like the world was against me and that I didn't fit in. When I was first diagnosed with autism I felt the world I knew was slowly collapsing around me. I felt as if I was being labeled ready to be put out on the shelf at the local supermarket ready to see if the world would accept me, accept my label. I'm not going to tell you it was an easy journey from when I first heard about the diagnosis to where I am today, it took lots of hard work and lots and lots of kindhearted people that God put in my path. This word retarded needs to diminish for good! We need to teach the kids of our generation that this word is not okay and that its time we step up and start learning to have inclusion. This word not only needs to come out of the dictionary but be banned from our planet, our solar system, and yet the milky way! All my friends and I want is to be like everybody else! The word retarded is in NO way any different from any other hurtful slang terms - it's derogatory, demeaning and hurtful - and that's more messed up than a soup sandwich! I mean come on have you even tried to hold a soup sandwich? It can get pretty messy! We are in NO place to judge others, or look down on others. As I learn in Sunday school every week, God loves each and every one of us no matter who we are or what we look like. We are supposed to love thy neighbors as ourselves. Actions are louder than words! So think before you speak! Thank you for your time and coming out to hear me speak about something I am very passionate about!"