

Collaboration for New Members

As a way to combat the stresses that new members experience, Regina Sarmiento, Mental Health Team Lead developed a plan that would help them adjust to Mainstream Living. After noticing the anxiety and even some hospitalizations over feeling new and nervous, Sarmiento decided it was time to come up with an idea to help these members adapt to their new environment.

Sarmiento knew that a lack of time and staff was a barrier to helping new members. Her first idea was to ask current members for their thoughts and opinions on how to help. Sarmiento asked them to share their experiences on what it felt like moving in and being new. Together, she and the members brainstormed ideas on how to make people feel more comfortable.

Through a collaboration and a group effort, they were able to identify ways in which they could help with this adjustment which included:

1. Having a welcoming meal for all members when a new person moves in, giving them the opportunity to meet and get to know each other.
2. Offering a 'buddy' to be a point person they can turn to if they have questions. This person would also check in on the new member periodically to answer questions and be a safe person to rely on.
3. Providing a welcoming basket for the new member with items they identified would have been helpful for them when they moved in.

The members were invited to be on the welcoming committee. Seven members signed up and hosted the first dinner, made welcoming baskets and identified the first 'buddy' for someone scheduled to move in.

For the first welcoming committee dinner – the members planned a menu which was approved by staff. Staff took them shopping and they purchased all of the items needed, cooked the meal and cleaned up. The welcoming committee has created an environment where they can all collaborate together. It resembles a 'therapeutic' community as they experience a similar setting to a family. They learn to work out difficulties and still be there for one another. Staff sit in on meetings and provide direction if needed. The goal is for them to learn the skills of how to build community that they can then apply with neighbors and others when they move out. Through the collaboration of Sarmiento and members they are also exploring how they can make and deliver baskets for other programs while maintaining confidentiality and the possibility of them being a "buddy" to other members in different programs.

Lu Wingfield
Vice President

Congratulations to the 2016 Educational Scholarship Recipients!



Breanna Gordon, Alex Miner, Emily Potter Lynch, Zach Mecham, Tammy Harris, Christine Bender, Jacob Potter-Lynch, Kris Krajnourch, Maria Knutson, Jade Hols, Mitchell Miller

Accountability Today



Bill Vaughn, President/CEO

"Understanding the true meaning of accountability makes us strong and enables us to learn. We are all accountable for our actions; their affect and influence on our lives and the lives of others." Sameh Elsayed

It's difficult to comment on accountability without taking a look at our larger world these days. Some of you know that I am a political junkie. I love politics and I am fascinated by all of the maneuvering, posturing, marketing and politics behind the scenes. However, this year I am disturbed by our national debate and the presidential campaigns of both parties. This time around,

more than usual, it appears that our leaders think that their actions and words are independent of the world, and that they should be immune from critical review, assessment or condemnation.

Our leaders are failing to hold themselves accountable. They set poor examples; attempting to justify their inappropriate behaviors, comments and extreme positions by saying that others are worse. There is a void at the top, no one is setting a higher standard, and no one is holding our leaders accountable. The press is no longer independent. They appear to have chosen sides and they are placing a finger upon the scales of accountability. And the supporters, on both sides, ignore their shortcomings and their hypocrisy in favor of attacking the other side to stoke everyone's worst fears. The lack of civility and total disrespect for each other is hard to watch. It is wasteful, it is divisive, and it is disgusting. It sets the poorest possible example for our children at their greatest time of need.

The lack of accountability is not good for our people or our country and we deserve better. Accountability is not optional! Our leaders have to hold themselves accountable, as well as those that they serve, their coworkers and colleagues, their communities and community organizations, their companies, and even their nation.

At Mainstream Living we know that accountability is not easy. It requires high moral standards and holding ourselves and others accountable to a greater mission and purpose. It requires following personal or professional values that are in alignment with our mission and our purposeful vision. Accountability means that together we will set and accept specific goals that we will hold ourselves and others responsible for attaining. Accountability exists only with personal responsibility and ownership of our behaviors, our personal ownership for the outcomes for the people we serve, and our fiscal responsibility for our budgets and services.

My father gave me a lot of good advice on personal character and accountability. He would say, "People need to know that your word means something; you should say what you mean and always do what you say." He wanted to make sure that I was clear with my expectations, and that I hold myself and others to a high standard. Above all else, he stressed the importance of taking ownership and responsibility for personal actions.

At Mainstream Living, personal accountability is one of our core values, something that sets us above the rest. We accept personal responsibility and we extend our accountability to our teams, and all levels of our organization. We hold each other accountable and we strive to ensure that our actions are transparent to each other and to the public. We believe that accountability applies to both individuals and to our organization. We believe that nobody is perfect, but everyone must be accountable for the things they say and do. We believe that everyone needs to take ownership and pride in their job as they strive to meet the needs of the individuals we serve and our organizational goals.

Bill Vaughn
President / CEO

Mainstream Living Announces Internal Promotions



JON ZELLWEGER

Bill Vaughn, Mainstream Living President and CEO, was proud to announce that Jon Zellweger will be assuming the role of Chief Operating Officer (COO). Jon has assumed a growing amount of responsibly as VP of Operations and oversees the division of Support Services operations to include: corporate compliance, benefits, office and property management, human resources, financial services, and representative payee supports. This role has grown, particularly with the expansion of services over the years and the shifts to regionalization of services and now managed care. As COO, Jon is the senior vice president, serving Mainstream Living for over 27 years, and will be second in command under the President/CEO and will work closely with all divisions. He will also continue direct oversight of operations for corporate compliance, employee benefits, office and property management, and human resources.



STUART AMBROSE

Mainstream Living is pleased to announce the promotion of Stuart Ambrose from Director of Finance to Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Stuart has been with Mainstream Living for 8 years, and has added many responsibilities during that time. He will be expanding his role in the oversight of all general accounting areas, budgeting, annual audit and cost reporting, and representative payee supports. November 1st he will be joining the Executive Management

Team in moving forward with the Managed Care Organizations. Stuart received his Master in Accounting from Iowa State University, and came to Mainstream after working in public accounting for several years. During his tenure here, Stuart has worked diligently to maximize and safeguard the agencies' assets to insure financial stability for future service provision.

Empowerment through Fiction



Sam has been a member of Mainstream Living since her 18th birthday. Her childhood was plagued with abuse from others – including abuse from the one person who should have protected her, her mother. At a young age, Sam’s mother put a gun to her head. Her teenage years were spent in a number of different placements including being moved to Utah. Not knowing how to manage her emotions and work through her trauma, Sam turned to drugs and even attempted to end her life. When she turned 18, she returned to Iowa and started services with Mainstream Living. The excitement of being an adult and starting over in a new home brought hope that life would be different. However, tragedy and trauma continued to chase her and the challenges of being an adult continued to weigh on Sam and further deterred her recovery.

In 2014, Sam found out that she was going to be a mother. This ignited a flicker of hope that life would finally be different. Sam began making changes so that she could be the mother that she had always wanted. On May 3rd, 2014 Josiah was born at just under 3 pounds.

After two short days, Josiah passed away. This tragedy stole everything from Sam, including her hopes and dreams of being a mother and being able to experience the joy of raising her child and creating memories as a parent.

Sam was unable to afford a proper burial and dealt with this disappointment for two years. She was not able to acquire enough funds to purchase a marker for her son’s final resting spot. A faded torn paper marked the grave and her inability to afford a grave stone caused her a great deal of anguish.

After several donations and the help of Mainstream Living, a permanent granite marker was purchased to honor Josiah. After the marker was set, staff at Mainstream Living accompanied Sam to the cemetery. Sam had no idea that staff had worked so hard to help her purchase a proper stone for her son’s grave.

Sam led the way to the grave expecting to find the faded paper marker. Upon discovery of the beautiful new granite marker, Sam was overtaken with an intense range of emotions. She

fell to Josiah’s grave and wept. Sam was at a loss for words, but hugged the staff with her and between sobs expressed how thankful she was for the thoughtful gift.

Elizabeth “Betsy” DeHaan



Respect by Inclusion

Paul Honold wanted to be part of the Beauty and the Beast play through the Urbandale Community Theater. There was no question about whether or not he should try out. He wanted to try this, so the only thing to figure out was how we could support him. Starting in May, Paul and staff began practicing for auditions. Paul’s parents took him to audition for a part in the play and on May 12th he received a call from the director offering him a role. There were over 90 people who auditioned and only 42 of them were offered a part in the play. Paul was the only cast member who

was diagnosed with a disability, but those who chose Paul for a role in the Beauty and the Beast chose to look past that and see his ability.

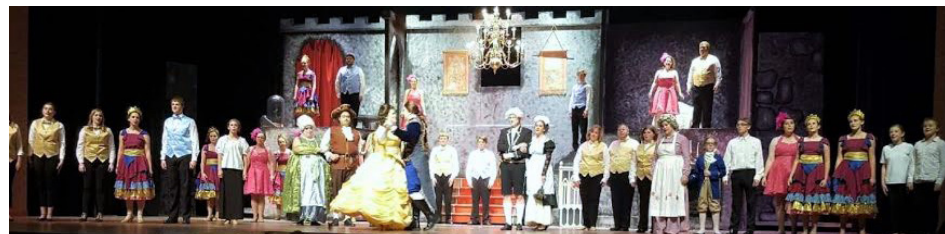
In late May, Paul began rehearsal three hours per day for five days of the week. In July, the actors began practicing daily for up to six hours per session. Paul had four parts in the play and multiple costume changes. His various roles in the play include the bartender, a fork, a villager and a gargoyle. The play included six showings with each performance lasting three hours.

Paul’s parents have attended all play practices and have gotten to know the cast members and director. On July 17th, Paul’s fellow cast members and director

threw him a surprise birthday party with balloons, cake and presents. The other cast members for Beauty and the Beast had an enormous amount of respect for Paul and always recognized the importance of treating him like everyone else.

A week prior to the start of the play the director approached Mr. & Mrs. Honold. He said that he would like to open up the dress rehearsal play to any folks who may otherwise not be able to afford to attend. Mrs. Honold extended the invitation to Mainstream Living members, Link Assoc., Child Serve and Gigi’s Play House. Paul had approximately 150 people attend this special performance, including his staff, housemates and friends. The amount of respect wrapped into this opportunity for Paul is incredible. It extends from Paul and his family to staff, the play director and the entire cast!

Traci Miner
Program Coordinator
Robin Brown
Team Leader



Integrity at Work

Integrity can often be described as “doing the right thing even when nobody’s watching.” At Mainstream Living, integrity is demonstrated every day when assisting members to feel their best, make a connection, or reduce a stressor. It’s these smaller, day-to-day opportunities to engage with integrity that can lead to big successes.

Brenda Shell has been a long-time member of Mainstream Living. She has lived in Story City, Ankeny, and most recently, Urbandale. Although each move has been necessary and has had positive outcomes, Brenda, who tends to have anxiety with change, was feeling concerned about missing her old connections and friends in her previous community when she moved to her latest home. Although staff reassured her that we would help her stay connected, it was clear she would need some help making some new connections in order to fully adapt to her new community.

One staff in particular, Megan Friestad, took notice of the mention of her wanting to find volunteer opportunities. Without prompting from her supervisor, Megan considered Brenda’s interests and abilities. She thought about the daycare where her children attended--Loving Arms Daycare in Johnston. Since staff had a good relationship with the director, she asked if Brenda could try out a short time of volunteering.

Volunteering at the daycare started out small for Brenda, working just Friday mornings for 1 to 1 ½ hours with 1:1 staff support. Megan

arranged the volunteering within her schedule so that she knew Brenda would have consistent support each time. Brenda was really excited about her volunteering from the beginning, she talked about it tirelessly. Brenda thought about extra things she could do for the kids, snacks, holiday trinket bags, treats, etc. Within a few months Brenda got more comfortable and she began expressing that she’d like to volunteer more and spend less time at her day program. It turned out the daycare felt the same way. They expressed that they would love to have her volunteer more, and since she was doing such a great job, she no longer needed staff support.

There was just one more thing needed to make this work; another staff, Devon Beerbower, would have to be willing to change her schedule to accommodate Brenda’s transportation needs. Mainstream staff were willing to make this change without hesitation. Devon realized that a small change in her schedule could have a big impact on Brenda’s life, and it paid off.

Brenda has now been successfully volunteering three days a week from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. at Loving Arms Daycare for a couple of months. One of her favorite activities is snacks and lunchtime, Brenda is very happy being able to interact with the kids during this activity. She may be tired by noon, but she is ready for her shift the next day.

Recently I had the opportunity to pick her up from the daycare. Brenda was just gathering her things to get ready to go as the kids were finishing their lunch. Several kids were reaching out their arms, asking Brenda for one more hug. All the kids said “Bye miss Brenda! See you tomorrow!” enthusiastically. Kudos to Megan and Devon for putting the value of integrity into action!

Margaret Petosa
Team Leader

Innovation in Communication



Meghann spent most of her life constrained to expressing herself with only a handful of words. Those with whom she had a relationship understood that although Meghann had a limited verbal vocabulary, she was a complex person with passions, specific needs, and varied interests. To outsiders however, this was not always the case, and her team recognized the need for her to expand her communication. Several years ago, her support team helped her to purchase and begin using a communication device.

Communication devices have gained recent popularity amongst people with disabilities, and The Center at Mainstream Living has been relentless in helping people learn how to use these devices correctly, expanding their social horizons using their newfound power of verbal self-expression. These pieces of technology can take a variety of forms, but in essence, they speak words for a person who has either typed them, selected pictures, or selected auditory cues. In other words, communication devices are like surrogate voices for people with speech difficulties.

Meghann’s device is a tablet with hundreds of pictures representing words she wants to say. When she first began bringing it to The Center, she would often repeat the same couple of words over and over. Due to the variety of activities and interactions Meghann encounters at The Center, it was a perfect environment for her to branch out, and begin to start saying new words. With encouragement and direction from staff, Meghann is now able to express herself in ways that used to seem impossible. Edward Morris, an Activities Coordinator at The Center

explains that when Meghann wants to choose an activity for the day, she easily, “Dials it up, finds the right screen, and says what she wants to do.” In the past, a decision like this would be cumbersome for Meghann, and often fraught with miscommunication. Now it is simple, quick, and incredibly rewarding for her.

A number of members apart from Meghann bring their communication devices to The Center, and the team has seen varying degrees of progress with all of them. Because of this success, the Sensory Program at The Center is now in the finishing stages of putting together a universally accessible communication device for anybody within the program. With donations from the Cyclone Corvette Club and the Cyclone County Ramblers, the program recently purchased a projector that can turn any wall into a touch screen. Members will be able to touch pictures on a wall to choose activities, say words, select multimedia, and explore new content.

“We have members without communication devices,” says Amber Vaughn-Schaefer, Program Director of The Center, “and we cannot always see their needs and wants. If we have something on the wall, members can show us what they want.” This new use of technology has the potential to open up new worlds of self-expression and social connection for members whose speech difficulties may have previously been isolating. The IT department is currently working with The Center to put the finishing touches on this project, and hopefully have it up and running within the next few months.

Mainstream Living recognizes that communication with others is vital to living a fulfilling and complete life, and has worked hard through the years to make communication accessible to everyone. With new innovations and technology on the horizon, we hope to see people flourish in this regard like never before.

Sean Goedken-Abramowitz
Assistant Team Leader