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A very happy anniversary

By **Mike Wade / NRVCS**
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PULASKI - Most of us celebrate our nation's freedom on the Fourth of July, but Jacob Sumler has his own yearly celebration of independence each July 1.

That date happens to be Jacob's anniversary. No, he isn't married, but the first day of July marks a truly significant turning point in his life. It happened to be the last time that Jacob was released from a psychiatric hospital - a stay which had lasted more than five years.

Fortunately, those days are long behind him. In fact, Jacob, 35, hasn't seen the inside of a psychiatric hospital since he was 21. His 14-year stretch of not being hospitalized is a huge accomplishment for someone who spent the vast majority of his childhood in and out of hospitals while counselors, doctors, and his own family struggled to help Jacob cope with his mental health issues.

"I guess you could say I'm a big-time success story," Jacob says with a grin and shrug of his shoulders. "The doctors told me [after being released from the hospital] that I would be back in two or three days."

Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and a psychotic disorder, Jacob now maintains his mental well-being in the community. Since being released from the hospital, Jacob has lived with a host home provider and has been an active participant in NRVCS' Community Recovery Center (formerly the Against All Odds Clubhouse) for years. He also visits with his psychiatrist regularly and maintains his counseling appointments.



Jacob Sumler

Photo - Mike Wade/NRVCS

"It just feels good to be free," Jacob adds. "Things are definitely a lot less stressful than they were when I was in the hospital all the time."

Being "free" certainly doesn't mean that Jacob isn't busy. He typically comes to the Recovery Center three days a week to

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Fairview Home staff balance professionalism with compassion

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DUBLIN - More than fifty adult residents rely on the employees of Fairview Home to assist them with their basic needs on a daily basis - from preparing meals to providing personal care to administering medications. It can be demanding work, particularly when considering that most of Fairview's residents have been diagnosed with a developmental disability and/or mental illness.

The range of disabilities - as well as physical health issues and age - vary greatly among residents at the Dublin assisted living

facility. While many individuals who live at Fairview are working to move back to independent living in the community, some individuals are expected to stay long-term.

As with any facility of this nature, there are occasions where both residents and staff at Fairview must come to terms with death. In the case of a resident who recently became terminally ill, Fairview Home employees demonstrated an extraordinary level of professionalism and compassion.

"Anne" (real name not being used to protect confidentiality) was

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Community transitions open doors of opportunity

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BLACKSBURG - Three years after the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) mandated that Virginia comply with the Olmstead decision to eliminate unnecessary institutionalization, individuals with developmental disabilities (IDD) continue to transition from the state's training centers to community-based programs, including those provided by NRVCS.

Mandy Seeberger, a IDD Waiver Support Coordinator for NRVCS, is responsible for overseeing transitions from both Southwestern Virginia Training Center in Hillsville and Central Virginia Training Center in Madison Heights to community living situations within the state. Seeberger, who took over the role last December, notes that the process takes approximately 12 weeks.

"Once we have an individual that's ready to transition, we first have to find an available facility or home for them to live in," Seeberger explains. "Then, we set up multiple visits to that site that include day, evening and overnight visits. At the same time, we're introducing them to other essential supports in the community, including some sort of meaningful day activity."

Seeberger adds that the collaboration between training center staff and providers of community-based services is critically important to ensuring a smooth transition.

"My job primarily is to bridge a relationship from the training center to the community once a family decides they are ready," said Seeberger. "It's something that can't be rushed or pushed through. We just have to be there for a family once they decide they are comfortable with making that move."

That collaboration and communication continues even after the transition is complete, notes Seeberger. Both NRVCS and training center staff monitor the individual's progress for a year after they move. Case management and other essential supports are ongoing.

"The teamwork that takes place in order to make this all happen is truly impressive," Seeberger continues, "...it's all about building relationships and establishing trust."



Mandy Seeberger

Photo - Mike Wade/NRVCS

Still, not everyone has willingly accepted the DOJ's decision.

"I think for a lot of families it really comes down to a fear of the unknown and that's completely understandable," says Seeberger. "The idea of having their loved one served in the community is a big adjustment and they need to be reassured that we can fully meet the needs of their family member."

Seeberger, however, firmly believes the benefits far outweigh the concerns.

"These individuals are now receiving care in a smaller setting where they get more personal attention," says Seeberger, "and they're getting a chance to take advantage of opportunities that may not have necessarily been available at the training center."

Seeberger concludes, "In the end, our focus is on making sure the individual has the best quality of life possible."

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be with his peers and friends, and spends the other two days working at Goodwill Industries. His weekends often include visits with his parents and spending time with his girlfriend.

Eric Lanoue, who supervises the Community Recovery Center, has worked with Jacob for a number of years. Lanoue has high praise for not only the progress that Jacob has personally made, but for the positive impact he is having on other consumers.

"I think Jacob's story is amazing and inspirational," remarks Lanoue. "I often have to toot his horn for him in groups with his peers so they'll know just how far he's come and all the work he's put into getting where he is."

"He is someone who has had to figure things out by trial and error over the years and he's just stuck with it and now he's got a lot to show for it," Lanoue adds.

It's not unusual to see Jacob with headphones on. An avid lover of music, he is usually eager to talk about his latest CD purchases - which oftentimes happen to be forgotten gems from the bargain

bin at Goodwill.

"I listen to just about everything - from bluegrass to Black Sabbath," declares Jacob, also a huge fan of Jimi Hendrix. "I don't know...It [music] soothes me. I even listen to it when I'm going to sleep at night."

As much as he finds comfort in music, Lanoue believes Jacob has that same effect on those he comes into contact with.

"Jacob is outgoing and friendly and provides a lot of genuine support to his peers," Lanoue explains. "I have seen him turn around a negative interaction between his peers with a simple humorous comment."

"He's a guy with a positive attitude, a lot of enthusiasm for enjoying life, and he shares that with the people around him," continues Lanoue. "Most people think that's just who he is and who he has always been, but he has experienced a lot of darkness in his life and found a way to overcome, to create a life for himself that is truly worth living."

a 63-year-old with mental illness who had been diagnosed with a severe COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). As her health continued to worsen, Fairview staff eventually reached out to Medi Home Health & Hospice to help make Anne’s final days as comfortable as possible.

“Anne’s mental illness made it difficult for her to trust people,” recalled Tamara Bowman, RN, Fairview’s nursing supervisor, “but about a week before she passed, she began seeking out people for comfort. She even got to where she was sleeping in a chair in my office - just because she didn’t want to be alone.”

Sherry Covey, a Registered Nurse with Medi, said Anne’s case was one of the most difficult that her staff has been involved with.

“There were issues with trying to find the right medications to help her relax,” Covey explained. “She was also in denial about her situation...She even had a wedding planned and had hopes of living until that happened.”

Once Anne’s passing became imminent, Fairview staff began a round-the-clock vigil to make sure someone was always at her side. Fairview Administrator Kristy McMahan noted that a number of her employees even came in to be with Anne on days they weren’t scheduled to work.

“Those staff didn’t even want to be paid for coming in,” McMahan declared, “but I explained that *we had to pay them* for their time...but I also realize that it serves their need as well. That’s how they say goodbye.”

While several staff remained with Anne in her final hours, Bowman said the care provided by Curry Bowling, a Medication Aide at Fairview, was especially touching.

“He held Anne’s hand, cooled her head, rubbed her arms, legs and hands - just doing everything he could to comfort her throughout the night,” remembered Bowman. “He was kind and

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**- Vicky Collins
Fairview Home Board member**

reassuring and all the while administered medications under the most difficult of situations...He really stood strong those last few hours - not only for Anne but for all of us.”

“It was just as if they [Fairview staff] were taking care of their own family,” remarked Covey.

Once Anne had passed that morning, McMahan said staff and residents were given an opportunity to pay their final respects.

“Every time we have a hospice patient, those are some of the proudest moments I have as an administrator,” McMahan added, “because I’m reminded of just how wonderful our staff truly is - even under pressure.”

Vicky Collins, a long-time member of the Fairview Home board and representative of the City of Radford, also had high praise for Fairview’s team.

“From the moment you pull on the grounds and walk in the building, you can tell that staff has a deep caring for those that they serve,” said Collins, who is also Director of the Radford City Department of Social Services (DSS) and a member of the NRVCS Board of Directors. “I know that staff at Radford City DSS and local government officials are comfortable that some of our most vulnerable clients are living in a compassionate and professionally run facility that places an emphasis on safety and appropriate care.”

“I think the care Anne received is a testament to the quality of nursing we have here at Fairview,” concluded Bowman. “They are nurturing and compassionate professionals who are simply made to do this kind of work.”

A LOOK AT NRVCS’ RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

Residential treatment and supports are a critically important component of NRVCS’ continuum of community-based behavioral health services. Included below is a brief overview of NRVCS’ current residential sites.

Facility Name	Function	Population Served	# of Beds	Location
Elmtree	Group home	Adults (18 and over) with developmental disabilities	12	Pearisburg
Fairview Home	Assisted Living Facility	Residents must be ambulatory and have a current diagnosis or history of a mental illness, developmental disability, and/or substance abuse disorder in remission	64	Dublin
Freestone #1	Group home	Adults (18 and over) with developmental disabilities	4	Radford
Freestone #2	Group home	Adults (18 and over) with developmental disabilities	4	Radford
Freestone #3	Group home	Adults (18 and over) with developmental disabilities	4	Christiansburg
Hopkins	Group home	Adults (18 and over) with developmental disabilities	4	Pulaski
REACH	Crisis Therapeutic Home	Adults (18 and over) with developmental disabilities served by the REACH (Regional Education Assessment Crisis Services Habilitation) program	6	Radford
New Horizons	Crisis stabilization	Adults (18 and over) with acute mental health issues	6	Radford, VA
New Life Recovery Center	Residential substance abuse treatment	Adults (18 and over) addicted to alcohol and/or other drugs	10	Radford, VA

In addition to the facilities listed above, NRVCS supports dozens of sponsor/host homes throughout the New River Valley. Sponsor homes give adults with developmental disabilities an opportunity to live in a private residence with an individual or family in the community. NRVCS also offers the HART (Healthy Alternatives to Residential Treatment) program for children and adolescents diagnosed with serious emotional and mental health issues. HART homes, which are also located throughout the community, provide a safe, structured environment in a family setting.



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New Life Recovery Center, FLASH group celebrate milestones

BLACKSBURG - Members of the recovery community and stakeholders from various partner agencies joined NRVCS on Thursday, June 18, to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the New Life Recovery Center and 20 years of the FLASH (Families Learning And Staying Healthy) support group. Over 200 people attended the “Recovery Works!” event, which was held at the NRVCS Montgomery Center.

New Life, a residential substance abuse treatment facility, reached the 15-year mark back on February 14, 2015. Located in Fairlawn, New Life is designed to serve adults (ages 18 and up) who are addicted to alcohol and/or other drugs. Individuals who complete the 30-day residential program receive after-care case management and relapse prevention services.

FLASH serves family members of persons living with addiction. The group meets weekly in Blacksburg (Monday evenings from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.) and consistently has 20-25 participants. The group meetings are free and strictly confidential.

To learn more about these programs, visit nrvcs.org.



“RECOVERY WORKS!” CELEBRATION

(ABOVE) More than 200 people turned out for the “Recovery Works!” event - an anniversary celebration for both the New Life Recovery Center and FLASH support group. Members of the recovery community and various stakeholders were on hand to express their support for both programs. (LEFT) New Life Recovery Center Supervisor Kat McClinton Saunders shares the history of New Life and FLASH with audience members. (Photos - Mike Wade/NRVCS)