



# Sharing the News

Newsletter of the Shared Living Programs of The Polus Center • Spring 2007 • Issue 1

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## Shared Living: *In the Community, Of the Community*

Fifteen years ago, the Polus Center, formerly called Transitional Resources, Inc. (T.R.I.) transformed its service model from group homes to Shared Living households. Shared Living is an alternative to more traditional residential service models which provide support in specially designed homes and programs. In Shared Living, individuals with disabilities live with families in typical homes. Families can be single adults, parents with children or unrelated adults sharing a home.

The Polus Center establishes and

supports households where people with and without disabilities live together in mutually beneficial relationships that are based on respect, affection, and caring and are characterized by loyalty and fidelity to one another. We promote the use of natural networks of support to help people with disabilities live and work within their communities. These networks may be part of a care provider's extended family, their neighborhood, or other community connections, such as work, church and

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## Ski Day, 2007: What a Day!

How many superlatives can one come up with to describe the 2nd Annual Polus Center Ski Day which took place on Thursday, March 1, at Wachusett Mountain in Princeton? "Fabulous!", "Gorgeous!", "Most excellent!" How about "Perfect"? That would probably be the best word to sum up the experience of over 70 people representing 25 of the Polus Center's Shared Living homes who converged on the mountain for a day of skiing, eating and schmoozing.

Once again, Theresa Kane organized a wonderful day of fun and food for folks associated with the Shared Living Programs of Polus. People came to the mountain from each of the four shared living programs.

The weather was, well, – perfect! The snow was just right for skiing and the temperatures were in the 30's. The sun was shining and nary a cloud was to be seen. Almost everybody ventured out of the lodge to enjoy the day and many people tried skiing for the first or second time. It was exciting to see Fran, Pat and Mark hop into one of the adapted ski sleds to take a spin down the hill. Sandra, Holly, and Dolores were outfitted with boots



*Holly Palmer and Sandra Washington enjoy a day on the slopes at Ski Day.*

and skis and had fun gliding down one of the hills.

Marc, Edna and Carol skied for the first time and appeared to be trying to set new speed records. Even falling at the bottom of the hill was fun because everybody was willing to help you up. All in all, about 25 people hit the slopes, many of them with the assistance of the Wachusett Mt. Adaptive Ski Program. This terrific program is dedicated to helping everybody enjoy the excitement of skiing. Since 1984, the Wachusett Mountain Adaptive Program has grown to be one of the finest in Massachusetts and is respected throughout New England. Their trained instructors help many people with physical and cognitive challenges experience the joy of winter sports.

Before and after skiing, everybody enjoyed the comfort of the lodge and the delicious food that was provided. Old and new friends got a chance to visit while warming up. Some folks took to the patio to soak up the sun while others hung out by the fireplace. A most convivial time it was, and we are all looking forward to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ski Day! ❁

## Welcome to Our Newsletter!

Welcome to the inaugural edition of "Sharing the News", a newsletter designed to inform people about the Shared Living programs of the Polus Center and to celebrate the individuals served by the Polus Center and their care providers. As the new Director of Training and Development at the Polus Center, I am excited to be adding "editor" to my job responsibilities. It is my hope that this newsletter, which will be published three times a year, will be a forum for positive stories and up to date information for our provider families and others interested in Shared Living. We invite your feedback and welcome your contributions of story ideas, photos and personal accounts. Above all we hope you enjoy reading "Sharing the News" and will "share" it with others!

Jan Doody, Editor

## Learning Opportunities Bring Providers Together

"Very informative!" "Reinforces the need and importance for good caregiving." "Gave me strength and courage and great insights." These were some of the comments made by home providers who attended the workshop, "The Power of Roles", presented by Darcy Elks this April. The one day workshop took place in three locations – Amesbury, Worcester and Dorchester, making it possible for 27 care providers in all to attend. Thank you to everybody who participated. We hope you found the event informative and inspirational. Thanks also to the Program Directors – Jack Powers, Laurie Sault, Wendy Swanson, Marc Jean Jacques and Althea Henderson – for hosting the workshops and assisting people to attend.

Darcy Elks is an experienced trainer in the field of supporting people with disabilities to lead full and meaningful lives. She is also the mother of a child with

a disability and shared her life for thirteen years with her friend Alice who had lived in an institution. Darcy brought her personal experiences to life as she helped participants understand the need for all people to have a variety of social roles that make them feel valued and loved. Darcy also spoke of various negative ways in which society treats people with disabilities. In order to create valued roles for people, she explained, those in helping roles need to recognize and work to overcome barriers to full and meaningful community integration.

We are grateful to Darcy for sharing so much useful information with us. We plan to continue the discussion of the issues that Darcy presented through a series of 1–2 hour forums for providers. We look forward to seeing many of you at upcoming gatherings at various locations and times around eastern Mass. Even if you were unable to attend Darcy's talk in April, you are invited to join Polus staff and care providers for lively and informative discussions on a variety of topics. These forums will, we hope, strengthen and enhance your experience as a care provider. They will also give you the opportunity to meet other providers in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Invitations will be in the mail soon! ❁

## Visit our Website!

The Polus Center website ([www.poluscenter.org](http://www.poluscenter.org)) is in the process of being revamped and we hope the new version will be ready by the middle of June. Per a recurring request, we are adding a "Providers' Forum" to post information important to providers and an area for you to ask questions, share experiences with one another, and find links to resources. At the Polus website you can also learn more about other initiatives at Polus, such as our international programs, Training and Development opportunities, and our economic development initiatives. We welcome your comments and input and hope to make this a user-friendly vehicle for communication. ❁

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## Shared Living Collaborative: A New Shared Living Agency is Launched on the North Shore

In July of this year, some people supported by Polus Center's North Shore Shared Living Program will be supported by The Shared Living Collaborative, with Daniela Morse as its Director and Jennifer Bognanno as its Assistant Program Director.

"This is an exciting opportunity," said Daniela Morse, currently the Program Director of the North Shore Shared Living Program, during a recent interview. "I am very grateful to the Polus Center for its support over the years and for its willingness to assist individual programs in spinning off. Michael Lundquist (Executive Director) and Theresa Kane (Chief Operating Officer) have been very supportive of the change and have helped me immensely with the nuts and bolts of starting my own agency."

Daniela's journey in shared living began in 1993 when she became a home provider with the Polus Center. Seven years later, Daniela assumed the job of Program Director for the North Shore area. North Shore Shared Living continued to grow in the ensuing years and now supports twenty five people in twenty households. The growth in the program influenced the decision to have Daniela's program spin off. Polus is committed to keeping programs small, and with the split, Daniela's program will serve thirteen people and the remaining twelve will remain with the Polus Center. Jack Powers, who has worked for the Polus Center for several years as a respite worker and home provider, has taken over as Program Director for the North Shore. Jack and Daniela have been working together to make sure there is a smooth transition for everyone involved.

"I believe that shared living is the best possible support option for people with disabilities," says Daniela. "It is not just a positive experience for the person with the disability, however. It is also good for my family and my community. My two sons have benefited tremendously from Virgilio and Lianne living with us".

Virgilio shared his life with the Morse family – Daniela, her husband Tom and their two sons, Maximilian and Thaddeus, for four and a half years and became a respected and beloved member of the family. They were devastated when Virgilio passed away and waited several months before inviting Lianne Crosson to move in with them.



Daniela Morse and Lianne Crosson on the ferry to Martha's Vineyard.

Tom and Daniela met Lianne when she was living in a group home. They felt an immediate connection with her and Lianne made it clear that she wanted to live with them. "She promised to do all of the cooking," Danielle remembers with a laugh. "That never happened, but Lianne has added so much to our family. My sons treat her like an aunt and all of their friends do, too. She's a member of our community and comes along on all of our vacations."

Daniela believes that in order for shared living to work, people must see it as a lifestyle, not a job. "We support households, not individuals," she told me. "A positive outcome is that people in the community come to see this as a natural way to live. It can have a multi-generational effect."

Everybody at Polus would like to thank Daniela for her years of service to the agency and wish her well in her new enterprise, The Shared Living Collaborative. ❁

## Shared Living: In the Community, Of the Community

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associations.

The Polus Center's Shared Living Programs currently support 63 individuals and 58 households. We also provide vocational support to twelve individuals through Commonwealth Business Associates which is part of the Greater Boston Community Network. There are four program offices representing the Polus Center's Shared Living Programs:

### • Central Mass. Community Network

Serves people in the Worcester area  
Office location: 255 Park Ave. 1st floor,  
Suite D, Worcester, MA  
Telephone: 508-752-8129  
Program Director: Laurie Sault  
Assistant Program Directors: Patricia  
Mafra & Godfrey Kollie

### • North Shore Shared Living

Serves people in the Merrimac Valley  
Office Location: 110 Haverill Rd.,  
Amesbury, MA  
Telephone: 978-388-0738  
Program Directors: Daniela Morse &  
Jack Powers

### • Shared Living Alliance

Serves people in the metro Boston area  
Office Location: P.O. Box 1371,  
Duxbury, MA  
Telephone: 781-934-8741  
Program Director: Wendy Swanson

### • Greater Boston Community Network

Serves people in the greater Boston area  
Office Location: 593 Washington St,  
Dorchester, MA  
Telephone: 617-506-6039  
Program Director: Marc Jean-Jacques  
Assistant Program Director: Althea  
Henderson



The Polus Center's Shared Living Program Directors:  
Seated: Wendy Swanson & Laurie Sault; Standing: Jack Powers, Althea Henderson and Marc Jean-Jacques

# Fifteen Years and Counting: *The Story of Carlos & Roberta*

On their first day of being in a Shared Living relationship through the Polus Center, back in March of 1992, Carlos Bruna and Roberta Dougan went on a Harbor Cruise in Boston. There is a picture of Carlos from that day, leaning on the boat railing, looking out to sea. There is an expression of contented contemplation on his face, as if he were wondering what the days and weeks ahead would be like

family and what we mean to each other.”

Roberta met Carlos when she was living and working in a group home for people with developmental disabilities in Boston. Her friend, Michael Lundquist, the Executive Director of the Polus Center, was interested in helping people with disabilities move into typical homes with typical families to “share life” together. He asked Roberta if she would like to meet a



*Roberta and Carlos relaxing by the fireplace at Ski Day.*

living in a house with Roberta as his roommate, in place of the confines of the residential school he had called “home” for the previous ten years. Fifteen years later, we know the answer to Carlos’ unspoken question. Carlos’ and Roberta’s fifteen years together have been a success, in spite of several moves and the day to day struggles experienced by just about everybody who chooses to live in relationship with another human being. They are the Polus Center’s longest supported Shared Living household. We congratulate Roberta and Carlos on achieving this milestone and celebrate with them as they continue their journey.

Roberta and Carlos’ story embodies many of the principles and goals of Shared Living: Their relationship is based on respect, affection, and caring; they are loyal to one another, and their lives have been enriched through sharing life with one another. In Roberta’s words: “We’re so connected – there’s no beginning and no end. Living with Carlos has helped deepen for me my sense of

young man named Carlos who was living in a residential school. She went to meet him and according to Roberta, “We clicked right away.” They moved into a house in Roslindale with another young man, Mark McGreal, and began their long relationship together. “We had lots of parties at the house on Neponset Ave. It was a lively place”, Roberta reports. Later on, Roberta, Carlos and Mark moved in with their friends John and Leah Burger who have two daughters, Lily and Rachel. Carlos became a valued member of the family and is still a cherished friend, as evidenced by an essay written by Lily several years ago when she was in fifth grade: “Ever since I was born I’ve known Carlos Bruna. He is the man who lives with me. He’s helped to form a part of my life and how I think about differences between people.” Lily goes on to describe what makes Carlos special: his love of music, his knowledge of everyone’s whereabouts, his desire for neatness and order, and the fact that he is “a really funny guy”.

In 2005, Roberta and Carlos decided to move to their own place – a cozy apartment in Roslindale down the street from their first home. Carlos is proud to show visitors his CD collection, his pictures of family and friends and his favorite hanging out space – an enclosed porch with a TV and CD player. He and Roberta enjoy a life rich in friends and community connections. On Carlos’ birthday, they went to Doyle’s, a restaurant in the neighborhood, with a bunch of friends – a tradition that started fifteen years ago, when Carlos first moved in with Roberta. This year, there were twelve people at the table, all there to celebrate with Carlos and to thank him for being a part of their lives. We thank you, too, Carlos and wish you and Roberta many more years of sharing life together. ❁

## Upcoming Events

### Wednesday | June 20, 2007

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM. DISCUSSION FORUM

#### **The Language we Use: Talking the Talk.**

This is the first Get Together and Discussion Forum for Polus Center Home Care Providers.

**Location:** Second Church, Dorchester. Join us for a lively discussion, networking and refreshments! Contact Jan Doody at 978-724-3361 for a detailed flyer.

### Friday | July 13, 2007

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM. WORKSHOP

#### **Understanding the Societal Context: What People with Impairments Are Up Against.**

**Speaker:** Jo Massarelli and Marc Tumeinski, Associates of Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger.

**Location:** Seven Hills, 81 Hope Ave., Worcester, MA. This workshop is similar to “The Power of Roles”, presented by Darcy Elks to Polus Center providers in April.

If you would like to attend, please contact Theresa Kane at 978-368-1099 or email [tkane@poluscenter.org](mailto:tkane@poluscenter.org).

### SAVE THE DATE!

### Saturday | August 4, 2007

10:00 – 3:00 PM. FAMILY PICNIC

The Polus Center’s **First Annual Summer Spectacular!** Join us for a Family Picnic at the **Franklin Park Zoo** in Dorchester. We are hoping that all Polus Center providers and staff will join us for a wonderful day of picnicking and fun at the zoo! A detailed flyer will be sent out soon. If you have any questions, call Jan Doody at 978-724-3361 or email [jdoody@poluscenter.org](mailto:jdoody@poluscenter.org).