



# Sharing the News

Newsletter of the Shared Living Programs of the Polus Center • Summer 2010 • Issue 7

## Eric Kramer Working Hard and Loving It

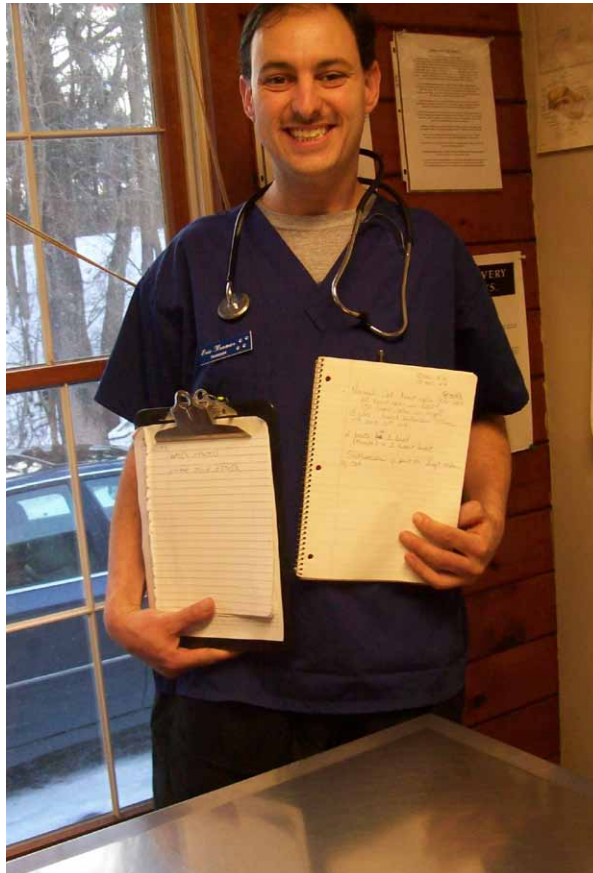
**E**ric Kramer of Salisbury is an animal lover. He knows a lot about caring for cats and dogs and enthusiastically shares his passion with everyone he encounters. That is just one reason why Eric's job at the Animal Health Center in Salisbury is such a good fit. Eric has been working part time at the center since August 2009 as an animal care assistant and maintenance worker. His job entails a wide range of duties that keep him busy and challenged.

Eric has a great attitude while at work. His motto is: Be as helpful as possible to Dr. Larson, the veterinarian and to do whatever he is asked to do. Nicole, a veterinarian technician at the center, is very pleased with Eric's job performance. "Because of Eric," she told me, "the exam rooms are always spic and span". She praises him for his ability to do a variety of jobs and reports that he gets along well with the customers –the humans and their pets.

Eric works most afternoons and every Saturday morning at the Animal Health Center. He starts his day by putting on his scrubs and checking out his job list. It helps Eric to have a checklist that reminds him of all of his job duties. The checklist also helps him to be more independent at work as he can refer to the list to see what to do next, instead of always having to ask a co-worker. Eric makes himself available when something unexpected occurs at

the center, such as when an animal needs comforting during a procedure or when there is an escape. "I've had to chase a few cats", Eric tells me. "And sometimes, I have to hold a dog for the technician so a procedure can go smoothly."

Eric has dreams of going to school to become a veterinarian technician or a dog



*Eric Kramer at work with his checklist and notebook.*

groomer. He studies the charts on the walls in the exam rooms to learn more about canine and feline anatomy and he studies at night from materials given to

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him by Dr Larson. Eric loves to talk about what he has been learning and is always eager to learn more. He keeps a notebook with information about animal care and refers to it often while talking about his job.

Steve Williamson from the Polus Center assisted Eric in getting his job the Animal Health Center. Steve helped Eric put together a resume and gave him advice on interviewing. Steve also helped Eric with his checklist of job duties and made sure he had transportation and was able to show up for all of his shifts. Steve talks to Eric everyday about how his job is going and helps him with any issues or questions that may come up. Steve is thrilled with the progress that Eric has made in the time he has been working at the Animal Health Center. Eric's success is due in large part to the support that Steve has given to him and to the staff at the center. His success is also due to the fact that Eric is doing what he loves with people who appreciate his skills and his willingness to do whatever it takes to keep the center running smoothly.

Congratulations, Eric! We wish you the very best as you pursue your career goals. 🌟

# Wendy Swanson: Farewell and Thanks

**W**endy Swanson has been an integral part of the Polus Center for over 20 years, so it was sad news for everybody when Wendy decided in July to move to Vermont to be with her extended family. Wendy has always considered the people she works with at Shared Living Alliance (SLA) as her “other” extended family. She has been a dedicated Program Director for many years and has become very close to all of the people she supports, as well as their families and friends.

Wendy will certainly be remembered for all of the wonderful gatherings she and SLA’s advisory Board put on twice a year for all of the households. These gatherings were well organized and fun events for the whole family and included crafts, music, food and fun. All who gathered together for these events share happy memories of friendship and fellowship. Wendy has been a wonderful help and mentor to all of us at Polus and we will miss the wisdom and knowledge she shared with us on a regular basis. All of the families whom Wendy has worked tirelessly to support over the years will certainly miss her as well.

We wholeheartedly thank Wendy for all she has done for Polus and the people we support. Best of luck and hope to see you at Ski Day 2011. ❁



Wendy and daughter Siri at a gathering for SLA families.

## White, Wild and Wonderful Ski Day!



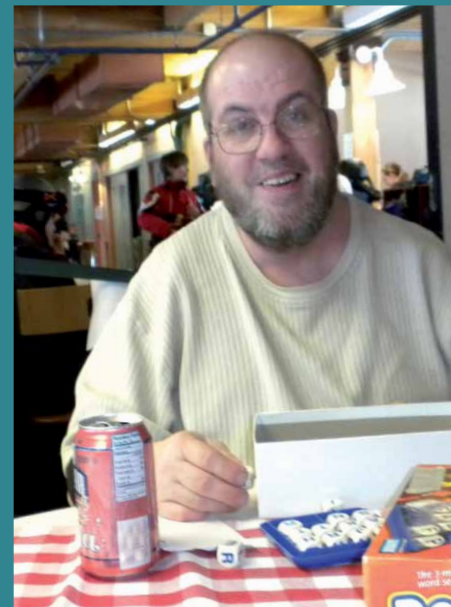
Peter, Naomi, and Dave, the instructor, take off for the slopes.

Light snow fell all day and the temperature was wintry at Wachusett Mountain for the Polus Center’s Fifth Annual Winter Celebration, otherwise known as “Ski Day”. Wednesday, March 3, turned out to be this winter’s last hurrah as warmer weather moved in later in the week. Over fifty people made the trek to Princeton, Mass. to enjoy a day of skiing, snow boarding, falling and getting back up again and lots of socializing in the cozy Granite Room.

For some it was the first time taking a lift up the mountain and coming down fast in a ski sled. Gary from Boston thoroughly enjoyed his spin down the mountain and Darryl from Worcester did great being on skis for the first time. Peter from Amherst loved being outside in the

snow and did his best to master the moving around on skis. Valerie from Mattapan brought her entire Shared Living family: Juanita, Jesse and the kids, all of whom took lessons and went skiing and snow boarding. It was an exciting and fun experience, even for those who took frequent tumbles and spills.

Knowing there was a delicious lunch waiting back at the Granite Lounge was an incentive for many who took to the slopes. Others spent most of the day inside the lodge, enjoying card games and visiting with friends. An atmosphere of friendliness and sharing was present throughout the day and contributed to yet another fantastic Ski Day. Thanks to all who participated! ❁



Jim Montgomery relaxing in the lodge.

## Provider Forum

### We’re All Life-Long Learners

**A**n animated group of Providers and Polus staff had a lively discussion on the topic of Learning and Teaching at a recent Provider Discussion Forum. We had fun thinking about things that we have to learn in order to keep up with modern times, whether it’s how to use a GPS or the self check out at the grocery store. Learning new skills keeps us active, interesting and leads to greater independence. This is true for everybody, including the people we support. Everyone is capable of learning throughout their lives. Providers have seen this first hand. People who were thought to be “unteachable” have learned to do amazing things and are often in the role of teaching others.

What helps us learn? Some of our thoughts on this topic are:

- People need to be motivated to learn. A new task should be something useful and relevant to the person. We all learn

best when we care about what we are doing. A young person, for example, is likely to learn how to operate a video game faster than how to operate a lawn mower.

- People need encouragement. Whether it’s a pep talk or something tangible, like money, we all learn better when we are rewarded for trying.
- People need patience. Everyone learns differently and at different rates. Some of us need multiple tries before we get it right and we all appreciate it when someone patiently hangs in there with us.
- We do better when others have high expectations of us – when they believe in our ability to grow.

- We need to really know the person we are trying to teach. Knowing what makes the person “tick” – like what his favorite time of day is or what makes him anxious will help set the stage for successful teaching and learning.
- The best way to teach is to tap into people’s interests and skills.

Providers came away from this forum with a better understanding of how we learn and how we can help others learn. Teaching somebody a new skill takes patience, creativity, perseverance and a belief in their ability to learn. Learning a new skill takes time and effort and requires a belief in yourself that you can learn and grow. I may even figure out that self check out thing someday. ❁

## Steve Williamson Promoted to Program Director for North Shore Shared Living

**S**teve Williamson became the new Program Director for the North Shore region in April when Jack Powers left to pursue another opportunity in the Merrimack Valley. We wish Jack the best and thank him for his years of service to the families on the North Shore.

We are delighted to have Steve as part of our team. He brings with him years of experience in human resources and training and development programs. Steve has worked as a consultant for Polus for several years, helping some of the people we support find meaningful work and recreational opportunities in the community, and has supported people on the North Shore since 2007. As Program Director, Steve has done an amazing job of leading the program, including instituting a learning center for Providers and families. He visits households on the North Shore and offers assistance with a variety of issues. Steve started his position weeks before our QUEST licensing process began. “Never a dull moment” has taken on new meaning for Steve and his coworkers and family. Welcome Steve, and thanks for all of your contributions to Polus. ❁



Jack Powers (left) and Steve Williamson (right) at a Polus Training event.

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## Spotlight:

# Did Someone Say Music?



ABOVE: Paul and Billy making music.

Billy Rosetti is familiar to anyone who has attended one of the Polus Center's social events, such as the Summer Shindig or Thanksgiving Dinner. He is the handsome guy with the big grin on his face dancing to the music of Paul McQuaid, Polus' resident musician and band leader. As one of Paul's biggest fans, Billy is the first one up on the dance floor when the music begins. For the past two years, Paul has had a unique role in making music an important part of Billy's life.

Two afternoons every week, Paul and Billy spend time together exploring the town of Nahant, near Billy's home in Revere, where they stop for sodas, do a few errands, and then head back home to make supper and entertain each other with a wide variety of music. Paul plays the guitar and at times Billy accompanies him on the drums. Billy sings along enthusiastically to standards such as "Take

Me out to the Ball Game" and "On Top of Spaghetti". The two also make up songs, some of which have to do with cooking and doing chores.

Billy enjoys lots of different kinds of music – Jazz, oldies, rock and folk. Paul, who is also a song writer, sings his own compositions as well. "Billy is really astute when it comes to listening to notes," Paul told me. "He has a keen ear and a great sense of rhythm."

Paul, as well as other people who know Billy well, has found that bringing music into Billy's routines helps him communicate. Billy has autism, and although he has a large vocabulary and understands a lot, he often has difficulty expressing himself with language. Music provides Billy with a more comfortable way to talk. He loves singing along with Paul and filling in the words that Paul leaves out. Like it does for most people, music helps Billy relax and puts him

in a good mood.

Singing, dancing and making up songs are a natural part of Billy's life and offer him a way to connect with other people. He shares his love of music with everyone in his life, not just Paul. Billy's Shared Living providers, Liz and Peter, and his parents, Dom and Genie, all recognize the power of music in Billy's life and use it in creative ways to help him or to just have fun.

As my visit with Paul and Billy was winding down, I listened as they sang a song Paul had written. The lyrics spoke to me of Billy and how he is growing through music: "I've come a long way to get where I've come. I've come along way to get where I belong." 🌸

## Information Sharing Event Held in Southern New Hampshire

For the past several months, the Polus Center has been exploring the possibility of offering Shared Living in southern New Hampshire. On the evening of June 30, an information sharing event was held for folks in the Keene/ Peterborough area of the state who have shown interest in Shared Living. The event was very well attended and included a panel of Polus Center staff and members of some of our Shared Living homes. They discussed what makes a Shared Living home a "home" and talked about the range of supports provided by the Polus Center. Many thanks to all who participated: Carrie Schuchardt, April Gouthier, Susan Smith, Carlos Bruna, Roberta Dugan, Dan Ricard and Edwin Acevedo.