



RMI

HomeFront

REACHING MAXIMUM INDEPENDENCE, INC.

LEAVING THE NEST

How group homes allow adults with special needs to achieve independence



Going away to college was never an option for Kaci Magee. When she was born, Kaci suffered severe and permanent brain damage from meningitis. Today, at the age of 21, Kaci has the mental abilities of a toddler and will always need help with daily living activities. She also has some autistic qualities and can only speak in one or two word sentences. While Kaci's disabilities limit her opportunities, her mother, Monica Stimson, made sure those disabilities didn't keep her from achieving as much independence as possible after high school.

Kaci attended The Arc of San Antonio's after-school program for 13 years, so when Monica and her husband began talking about group home options, they turned to Pam Stephens, The Arc's Director of Community Outreach Services and a long-time RMI Board member. In her role at The Arc, Pam helps special education students and their families transition from the free resources provided by the public school system to the more complicated network of services and funding sources available in the community. At 18, Kaci could only attend school a few more years and Pam helped Monica get all the information she needed to plan for her daughter's future.

The decision to move Kaci into a group home did not come easily for Monica. "It took about a year for me to accept that a group home might be a good option for her," admits Monica. She and her husband had only been married five years and didn't have any family living nearby who could help care for Kaci. "We were finding it hard to find time to do anything," says Monica.

When Monica was finally ready to consider a group home for Kaci, Pam Stephens arranged a tour of several houses. Their first stop was at Boulder Oaks, a six-

person home operated by RMI. "I fell in love with it, but there wasn't an opening right away," remembers Monica. "We had to wait over a year, but that gave me time to adjust to the idea of Kaci moving away from home." Monica did look at other group homes while they were waiting for an opening at Boulder Oaks, but no other place felt right. In June of 2010, Monica finally got the call she had been waiting for. After a weekend trial stay, Kaci moved into her new home with RMI.

There are times when Monica feels a little guilty because she isn't always the one taking care of Kaci. "My friends advised me to look at the move as if Kaci were going to college," she says, "but I like to think of it as if she is in daycare." Monica picks her daughter up several times a week for dinner or outings and brings her home every other weekend for a visit. Kaci loves the time she spends with her mother, but is always glad to get back to her life at Boulder Oaks. The move has definitely given Monica and her husband more freedom. More importantly, Kaci has grown to be more independent than her mother thought possible.

The thought of letting a child leave the nest can be scary for any parent, but especially for parents of children with disabilities. Many parents believe the best place for their adult child with special needs to live is in the family home. In most cases, however, living at home isolates people with developmental disabilities from their peers and from community activities that promote personal growth and independence. Group homes are a great alternative for individuals with severe disabilities who will always need assistance with daily living activities, but they can also serve as the first step to a more independent life for those who are capable of living on their own with the right support systems in place.

Monica Stimson was fortunate to have the support and encouragement of friends and professionals who wanted the best for her and for Kaci. What is her advice to families going considering a group home option? "Use your heart to decide," she says, "then do tons of research to find the best place for your child and wait for that home! It will be the beginning of a whole new life with new possibilities for all."



*By Pamela Kelly
Executive Director, RMI*

From the HomeFront

There was a time when people with developmental disabilities had very few residential options. Today, individuals can choose to stay in their family home and receive assistance with independent living, live in a group home with 3 or more residents, or take advantage of support services that allow them to live in their own home or apartment. RMI offers a wide range of Medicaid-funded and private pay programs that accommodate the residential needs of adults with developmental disabilities and their families, whatever those needs might be.

Group homes can be a great alternative, either temporary or long-term, for people at different stages of their life. A group home setting might meet the needs of a younger person just out of high school who needs a little separation from mom and dad to reach the next level of independence or to grow through new challenges and exposure to a new living environment. Older adults who have lived on their own, but now need more support, may find moving into a group home more appropriate than placement in a nursing home. A high functioning individual may choose a group home to practice independent living skills before moving into that first apartment away from home.

In addition to the variety of residential options RMI can provide, our residents and their families also benefit from the quality and longevity of our staff. Last year RMI had a turnover rate of 38% for our direct care staff compared to the state average of 75%. Direct care staff are the hard working individuals in group homes who make sure dinner is ready, the laundry washed and residents are safe. They are also the teachers and the comforters. Because adjusting to change can be especially hard for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, RMI is committed to creating a supportive and nurturing environment that enhances the quality of life for our residents and for the direct care professionals who serve them.

OUT AND ABOUT



Top: Residents from RMI's apartment programs traveled to Corpus Christi for their annual trip on September 17 and 18. The group of 22 enjoyed time at the beach, visited the Texas State Aquarium, stayed overnight at the Best Western Shoreline, ate at The Diner and shopped for souvenirs. (RMI residents from left to right: Dale Bowers, Kristi Lawless, Holly Brotherhood, and John Davison).

Right: On July 28th, 18 adults from RMI's Life Enrichment Day Program watched the San Antonio Silver Stars beat the Phoenix Mercury from box seats at the AT&T Center. Our thanks to Kasi Smiley with Spurs Sports & Entertainment making this game a very special experience for our participants. As shown by the smile on Ronald Larkins face, everyone had a great time!



Karen LaPorte Pumphrey honored at the RMI Champion Award Luncheon

On Sunday, August 14th, RMI hosted a luncheon in the Terrace Club Restaurant at the AT&T Center to recognize Karen Pumphrey for her work with special education students and their families. As the lead Specialized Instruction teacher and Special Education Department Coordinator at Clark High School in Northside ISD, Karen's passion for promoting inclusion and independence for her students has reached far beyond the classroom.

At the start of her teaching career more than 16 years ago, Karen created the Friends Having Fun club to connect her students to the community and foster a social network for both students and their parents. Through Friends Having Fun, Karen's students have developed friendships and experienced the world through trips to Europe, Disney World, Canada, Alaska and New York City. Although she has been the recipient of many awards over the past 10 years, Karen sees the connection to her students and their families as her most important achievement. "My greatest professional accomplishments are the everyday, unnoticed moments of calling students forward to learn something new and helping them thrive in unexpected ways."

RMI thanks the following for their Champions of Support Sponsorships



Suzanne & Jerry Fischer • Judie & Paul Gustafson • Marcia & Bill Stipek



Gordon Hartman (left) presented the Champion Award to Karen Pumphrey (right) on court at the AT&T Center before the San Antonio Silver Stars game on August 14, 2011.



Staff and program participants at RMI's Life Enrichment Day Program took on the role of characters from The Wizard of Oz while making a movie about their spiritual journeys. Volunteer and Vitas Chaplain, Julie Woody, coordinated the project at the Episcopal Church of Reconciliation where the Life Enrichment program is located. Filming wrapped up at the end of the summer and the project is now in the editing stage. RMI hopes to host a premier of the completed movie in early 2012. Cast members included RMI staff members Mary Riojas, Patricia Ramirez, and Melissa Navarro (back row) and Life Enrichment participants Layla Wiley and Jamie Bentley (front row).



Second year Physician Assistant students from the University of Texas Health Science Center provided health education workshops to residents from RMI's apartment programs. Workshop classes were held over two months and topics included "Nutrition and Exercise", "How to Respond in Certain Situations", Prescription Safety" and "Disease Prevention". The nine RMI residents who participated in the project received certificates of completion at the end of the project. Above: RMI resident, Dale Bowers (center), with the Physician Assistant students from UTHSC.

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Where can you find news, stories, resources and events for an about people with disabilities?

disabilitysa.org
empower • embrace • educate

disABILITYsa.org was created in 2007 to:

EMPOWER
SHARE information, resources, ideas and support between people with all types of disabilities

EMBRACE
HIGHLIGHT organizations and businesses that provide these services

EDUCATE
ADVANCE public attitudes, awareness, respect and consideration for the success of individuals with disabilities

In 2007, a group of women, working for local nonprofits, came together to talk about ways to create awareness around issues facing individuals with disabilities. AccessAbility Fest, a one day event *bringing resources and recreation to individuals with disabilities and their families* was born. Over the course of the year, it became clear that there was not a single resource in San Antonio that brought together information about development, sensory, physical, and mental health disabilities in one place. So, the idea of AccessAbility Fest became a year round concept through the creation of disABILITYsa.org. Today, disABILITYsa.org is at the forefront of providing information on legislative issues, inspiring stories, educational opportunities, special events and bringing together the resources of our community with the needs of people who live here.

Are you currently working for a state, city or other government agency? We need your help!
Please designate RMI on your SECC or SAMA campaign materials this year to help meet the needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in your community. Thank you!
SECC #413125 or SAMA #8005