



# NEWSLETTER

*Community Life and Meaningful Work for People with Disabilities*

Fall 2019, Vol. 11, No. 1

## We are thrilled to announce that High Spirit is now a Pilot Program

**H**igh Spirit has become a Pilot Program of the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, allowing us to integrate the home, community, and work life of our residents, as well as to support our staff as salaried professionals.

In traditional arrangements with the DDS, residents live in homes with providers who receive a stipend rather than a salary, to contribute to the room, board and care of residents. Residents typically leave the home, often in a shared van, for a community based day program for up to 30 hours a week. Day programming is supported by separate DDS funds. Budgets and timesheets are used to account for those 30 hours. Additional budgets and timesheets track residential hours.

At High Spirit, residents live and work in a holistic and balanced way, moving from their home to their work on site or to activities in the outside community as they need. The schedule is flexible and has a rhythm that aligns with the residents' interests and abilities. Life at High Spirit does not happen from 9–3, nor do our crew have the ability to be at their best during that whole period. Some may be up early, feeding farm animals breakfast, before coming back to their house for their own breakfast. Other people may require a period of quiet time to listen to music or to rest before they are able to head into town for swimming at the Community



**Back row: Paul, Paulina, Rory, Moritz, René, Randy, Austin. Middle row: Ashley, Will, Lucy, Bar, Lesley, Derek. Front, seated: Tabea, Mira**

Center or a trip to the market or the library. This integration of work and life is also true for our staff, who both live in a DDS supported home and are salaried to work on the farm and to engage in community activities with our residents.

With the launch of the Pilot Program, Commissioner Jane Ryder and her team at DDS recognize that High Spirit is providing a rich and purposeful life for our residents in a much less restrictive setting than would be possible elsewhere. The Pilot Program also allows High Spirit to break free from the 30 hours a week framework. Animals need to be fed, eggs collected, gardens watered every day of the week; the Pilot Program allows us to work on a seven day a week schedule.

Finally, this new model allows us to recognize our staff as the professionals they are. DDS also understands that creating a professional class of Householders, who live and work with residents, might draw more people interested in the work and to choose it as a career.

From our earliest concept meetings, in which we envisioned all that we hoped High Spirit could be, we dreamed that our community would offer a new way of caring for people with special needs, and particularly for those with complicated and often intensive needs. With the launch of the Pilot Program, we are fulfilling a goal of our mission statement: to serve as a catalyst for investment in this model of care, community and service.



**Lunch outside**

**Left to right: Levi, Ashley, Rory, Bar, Lesley, Steven, Randy**



## Meeting the Need with a New Model

### The need is increasing:

According to the FY19 Legislative Report for the Department of Developmental Services, In Massachusetts this year alone over 1000 young people with “severe disabilities,” including Intellectual Disability or Autism, will turn 22, graduate from school services, and will need community based day services and/or residential services. In 2017 the Baker-Polito Administration, with the advocacy of Commissioner Jane Ryder, recognized the increasing number of individuals requiring services, requested and then received a significant increase in appropriations for FY18.

### Meeting that need:

Given the increasing demand for both residential and day program services, the need for many more trained people to deliver services is increasing accordingly. Training those people becomes the key to providing quality support for individuals with special needs. In our community, at High Spirit, we work to ensure that our full-time staff, whom we call Householders, have both the supports and financial security they need to remain in their positions long term.

Our goal has been to allow Householders to build a career as professionals by offering training and by paying them with a taxable salary, thereby:

- eliminating the need for outside employment
- allowing them to pay into/receive benefits from Social Security
- allowing them to qualify for credit cards/loans and to build a credit history
- allowing them to build a retirement account

At High Spirit we are fully aware that we can only provide residential services to a limited number of individuals with special needs. We also know that our small size is a critical ingredient for maintaining the quality of our direct services, and so are committed to keeping our residential program small. Therefore, how can we help others? Firstly, we are committed to expanding our day program. Secondly, we are meeting with others and giving presentations in order to intentionally share our model with others, to encourage more people to take the leap and begin other small intentional communities.

### Why the Householder position is appealing:

Our model has the potential to draw many people who are

looking to integrate their work and family lives. Our model also offers a career that can be both rewarding and fulfilling, while also providing a level of financial security.

### How does one become a professional Householder?

Becoming a professional Householder requires extensive training, offered predominantly in an internship style model. At High Spirit interns start with basic training which must be completed before any direct work with individuals with special needs can begin:

- First Aid & CPR
- Basic Human Rights (DDS)
- Human Rights Advocate (DDS)
- Positive Behavior Supports (DDS)
- Basic Fire Safety (DDS)
- DPPC Training
- Signs and Symptoms of Illness Training
- 50+ Hours of Individualized Training (resident's individual medical, physical and emotional needs, methods of communication, behaviors, etc.)

Once basic training is completed, the intern will begin to shadow and then support Householders, learning the specific needs of an individual, as well as how best to support the individual during the broad

range of locations and activities that happen over the course of the day and the week. The intern is then equipped to address not only an immediate situation, but also to understand the larger picture of an individual's needs and concerns, and to help an individual manage anxiety.

### Derek Eshelman, a long-term Householder at High Spirit, describes his work:

*“I learned early on that a daily rhythm and a predictable schedule are important for people with intellectual disabilities, but I found that same structure and stability help me enormously too.*

*Sometimes people say that I’m a saint because I do this work, and I am not. I get so much from this job. No one can do a job where they only give and give. I can give of myself here, but I get just as much back from other community members. The residents of this community have taught me so much about how to form close communal bonds, and that happiness comes from deep relationships with other people, and with commitment.”*

Derek Eshelman  
Householder and Head of  
Livestock Crew



Derek with Will



An evening of beer and hymns (Bar, Derek, Lesley and Randy)



## Farming as a Process

On the farm at High Spirit, food production is not the only measure of success. In fact, it is not even the most important measure of success. What we value even more than food is the personal growth and satisfaction that comes from farming together.



Rory with the chickens

However, as we've gotten better at matching residents with jobs they enjoy and all working together, we've noticed our harvests increase in size every year. This year was no different, and we're quite proud of the final tally! We grew almost 1,000 pounds of vegetables and raised 125 chickens, 20 pigs, and 2 goats.

In order to accomplish this, participants of the High Spirit



Randy picking lettuce



Will cutting garlic

day program farmed daily from mid-March and will continue to work through December. Together, we have put in thousands of hours learning new skills, building confidence, and creating friendships that become stronger every year as we tend the garden and care for the livestock.

Compared to production farmers, we may not work as fast, we may stop for more breaks, our rows may not be as straight, but we're out there together in the fresh air and sunshine each day making something that gives us a sense of pride, responsibility, and peace.



Bar preparing soup with our own shiitake mushrooms

## Welcome to Our New Members of the Board of Directors



**Dagmar Herzog** is a Professor of History, proud to call western Massachusetts her home. She is currently writing on resistance to the Nazis and the history of disability rights activism. Above all, she is the mother of Lucy, a cherished member of the High Spirit community.



**Tamara Sheen** has worked with individuals with special needs for over 30 years. She has been a houseparent and vocational teacher at Camphill School and at the Beaver Farm Transition Program, where she developed a Kitchen Program, producing commercial grade foods. Tamara moved up to the Berkshires four years ago to be close to her family, including two grandchildren. Tamara has been involved with High Spirit as a friend and as occasional relief staff, working with our young people, cooking nutritious meals for the community. As well as cooking and teaching, Tamara loves gardening and singing traditional music.

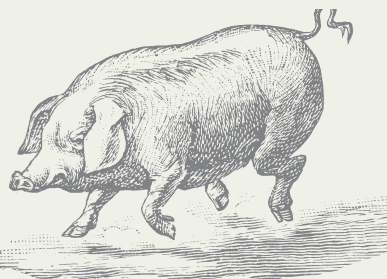
## High Spirit Community Farm

fulfills an essential need for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities by providing meaningful work, a dignified home and a rich social and cultural life. To that end High Spirit:

- Provides and supports homes where our community members live as a family.
- Directs a farm program, offering on the job training in agricultural work and sustainable practices.
- Expects our members to be responsible, participatory, considerate citizens of the High Spirit community and the larger world.
- Trains young volunteers to provide care to disabled peers and inspires them to be leaders as respectful, inclusive and conscientious adults.
- Serves as a catalyst for investment in this model of care, community and service.

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Dea Angiolillo, *Director*  
Dagmar Herzog, *Director*  
Tamara Sheen, *Director*  
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Our thanks to all who have supported High Spirit between November 2018 and October 2019.

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