



# NEWSLETTER

Community Life and Meaningful Work for People with Disabilities

Fall 2020, Vol. 12, No. 1

## Hunkering Down: Continuity and Adversity in a Pandemic

As the pandemic took hold here, the High Spirit community reacted not only with heightened fear and worry, but also with determination to do everything we could to keep members of the community safe. In March, as we learned more about COVID-19, it soon became clear that people with underlying health conditions are among the most vulnerable, as are people who live in close proximity to others – all of which is part and parcel of life at High Spirit Community Farm.

Our Householders and Crew Leaders at High Spirit have been doing extraordinary work in extraordinary circumstances. As we look back over the last six months, we do so with the pride of a job well done. Our community remains COVID-free, with all of our members healthy, engaged, and enjoying a bountiful harvest.



Lesley and Bar

The integration of High Spirit's residential and day programs has allowed us to keep our site-based farm operational since March. This has been crucial for maintaining purpose and a sense of normalcy for staff and participants alike.



Rory

We have continued to fulfill our mission's goal to provide meaningful work. With our farm right on our property, we are fortunate to spend the days together, working in the fresh air, and then enjoying our own good food, even as grocery store shelves were often bare. We are also fortunate to have a cohort of three households who live and work together. This larger social bubble has been a comfort, even as we isolate from the world beyond. At times, we even enjoy how the pace of life has slowed!

## Co-worker Interns 2020-2021

The pandemic brought with it travel restrictions, and kept us from welcoming the international volunteers who usually arrive in September to spend the year with us. This abrupt change of plans required us to scramble, to interview and hire through new sources for interns from the US instead. The result has been a wonderful silver lining: we have a fantastic crew of Americans. This year's interns include Paul, who is now in his third year,

Alex, in the middle of his first year, and three new people: Hannah, Molly and Clara. These interns are older than the European gap year students, and they bring more experience and life wisdom to the job. English-speaking interns also are able to take on more responsibility more quickly as well, since their overall learning curve is less steep. We are thrilled to have this crew with us for the year ahead.



Clockwise from top left: Alex, Molly, Clara, Paul, Hannah

However, as social isolation continues, we are deeply aware of how life today doesn't compare favorably to the richness of life before the pandemic. Our mission's goal to eliminate the social isolation that people with disabilities often experience, the goal of being seen, known by, and engaging with the

Great Barrington community, cannot be met at this time. We have lost the joys of being out and about in town for activities, musical performances or gathering with friends. We miss visits from our beloved therapists, family members and the volunteers and friends who normally come and go

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## Hunkering Down, continued

from the community, enriching our social life and day programming.

In addition, our Householders and Crew Leaders have lost the bits of respite and private time - either in their houses or away from High Spirit - that they need and rely upon to relax and refresh while working at this demanding job. While their commitment to our

residents and the work has not faltered, this period of COVID is exhausting for them and the end of the pandemic is not in sight. These workers - truly the first, the daily, and the essential responders at High Spirit - are our heroes and deserve the recognition, accolades, and support of us all.



Harvest



Austin and Rory



Lucy



Derek, June and Bar



Robin and Randy

## Improvements at Seekonk House

This past winter and spring we were able to do some much needed renovations at Seekonk House. Seekonk was our first High Spirit home. When we purchased it in 2008,

it had been a bed and breakfast, and the kitchen was already tired. We made do for another decade and more, until it was well beyond tired. The entry and boot room was a modified

store room, without sufficient heat or ventilation to dry our mittens or keep away mold.

Thanks to your support we renovated the Kitchen, expanded

and rebuilt the Boot Room and add a new entry porch. Our Seekonk household members and all the community thank you!!



Seekonk House kitchen



Seekonk House people



## Rachel Cohen and Matthew Scala have joined High Spirit as our newest Householders and Crew Leaders.

They come with a rich history of life experiences, wonderful energy and excitement to be part of the Community. We asked Rachel and Matthew to share with us what brought them to High Spirit.

*"If you had told us in February, 2020, that in August we would be leaving our lives in New Hampshire and moving to Great Barrington, Massachusetts to be Householders at High Spirit Community Farm we would never have believed it. But here we are!"*

We are delighted to have Rachel and Matthew with us. In early August Rachel and Matthew moved into Aurora house, joining residents with special needs and a team of volunteer interns. They have been immersed in both the required trainings as well as in the more nuanced task of learning the language of each resident, both verbal and non-verbal, and about their interests, challenges and needs.



**Rachel and Matthew**

They are settling into Aurora House, and making it their home, while working hard each day in the Farming Program, Household programing, and being part of community life.

Rachel has been interested in community living since she learned of it in her early 20s, when she was a VISTA volunteer, working to create a cohousing community in Concord NH, and later working with Upward Bound, a residential program supporting teens. Rachel also brings work

experience in marketing and technology, training in curative practices including Yoga Dance and Reiki, and the wisdom and skills of a mother.

Matthew has been exploring alternative work and living arrangements for his entire adult life. He is a carpenter, a potter and a farmer. In recent years he had a farm in Maine, which had "everything I wanted, except love". He left Maine to be closer to Rachel, finding work at Plowshare Farm, a Camphill affiliated community in New Hampshire, where he worked closely with people with special needs, guiding them in their work with the dairy cows. Matthew found he loved working with his team, and discovered the joys of community life as well.

*"But for us, when the pandemic hit everything changed."* Matthew was required to be part of the COVID lockdown at Plowshare, and this meant that he and Rachel were apart. *"Our desire to create a more sustainable life took on a new urgency. We scoured the internet to see what we could find with the following list of criteria: living in community, farming, working with people with special needs. High Spirit Community Farm bubbled to the surface, perfectly matching our criteria."*

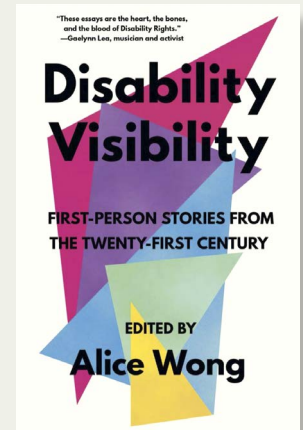
Rachel called to learn more about the community and found that High Spirit was looking for more Householders. *"During the interview process we met the extraordinary group of people who would become our peer Householders and Crew Leaders, as well as an active Board and a supportive Administration. We saw a vibrant and supportive community that we wanted to be a part of."*

Rachel and Matthew, welcome! We are so glad to have you at High Spirit!

### Book Recommendation:

**Disability Visibility:**  
**First Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century,**  
Edited by Alice Wong

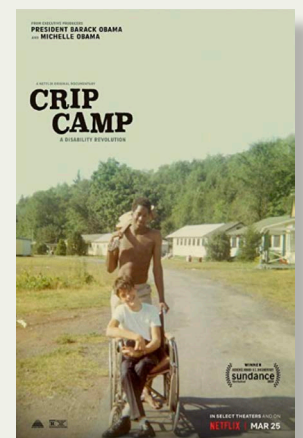
This collection of essays tells powerful accounts of the experience of having a disability.



### Movie Recommendation:

**Crip Camp:**  
**A Disability Revolution**

This 2020 Documentary tells the story of a groundbreaking summer camp and inclusive community that galvanized individuals with disabilities to become civil rights activists. Sundance award winner.



## 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:

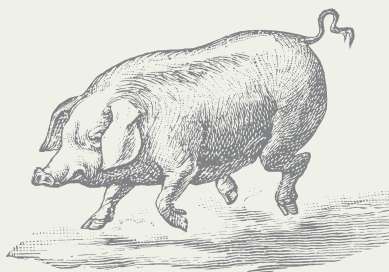
- Provides and supports homes where our community members live as a family.
- Directs a farm program, offering on the job training in agricultural work and sustainable practices.
- Expects our members to be responsible, participatory, considerate citizens of the High Spirit community and the larger world.
- 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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**Note: Please contact us with any omissions or errors. Thank you.**

We are deeply saddened by the passing of our friends and long time supporters Julie Henry and Betsy Herman. Julie Henry lived a life of service, including practicing social work at Boston Children's Hospital and later, with her Masters in Public Health from Harvard, at New England Serve, where she supported children with special needs. Betsy Herman died from COVID-19. Betsy was a vibrant and energetic person who brought that energy along with a Masters in Special Education to her work supporting people with disabilities. We are honored that Julie and her husband Bayard Henry and Betsy and her husband Bill Herman have chosen to support High Spirit over the years. Thank you all.

## Contact Us:

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