



# NEWSLETTER

Community Life and Meaningful Work for People with Disabilities

Fall 2016, Vol. 8, No. 1

## Aurora House Is Open!

In July, after much planning, preparation and patience, our new Head Householders, Troy and Aly Hanshe, have opened Aurora House, the second life-sharing house at High Spirit. Aurora is now home to its first resident with special needs, Lucy, two volunteers from Germany and Italy, who will spend the year at High Spirit, as well as to Troy and Aly and their dog Lou.

In order to get ready to serve residents with special needs Aly and Troy spent several months training in therapeutic techniques. Training included working closely with the Householders and residents of High Spirit's Seekonk House, traveling to Camphill communities—Heartbeet Lifesharing in Vermont and Beaver Farm in Pennsylvania—to observe and learn best practices. They attended Department of Developmental Services courses to learn the health and safety requirements of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and they

endured the dislocation, dust and debris of living in a construction site as the new spaces of Aurora House were renovated and brought up to code.

Now the home and the community they envisioned is blossoming. Under the direction of Aly and Troy, the main house and its new bedroom wing welcome people into beautifully arranged spaces that balance comfort, privacy, community and safety—both a therapeutic environment and comfortable home.

In Aly's words:

*There is a lot that goes into working out the constellation of a shared-living house, but we are truly enjoying the process. Being part of the growth of the community has been profoundly gratifying to us. As we continue to deepen our roots here, we look forward to each day of learning and living in such a special place. We are honored to be a part of this incredible family and to call it home.*



2016–2017 Volunteer Coworkers and High Spirit residents, apple picking. Left to right: Jantje Mundt, Merla Lau, Lucy Staub, Jule Fischer, Rory Adams, Bar Swain, Dani Rossi and Will Cochran. Missing: Nils Turner

## 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 life-sharing homes where our community members live as a family.
- Directs a land-based 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.

### Board of Directors:

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Left to right: Troy and Aly Hanshe, Lucy Staub, Merle Lau, Dani Rossi



Derek Eshelman, far right, with Caro Stocker and Bar Swain



Lunch at Aurora house. Our beautiful table was made by Peter and Carl Von Mertens, step-dad and uncle of Will Cochran.

## We Asked Derek Eshelman, Head Householder at Seekonk House, How Does It Feel Now that High Spirit Has Opened a Second Home?

Around a year ago, High Spirit announced it would open a second home. Lesley and I were excited but unsure how much this addition would change our daily lives. Aurora House has now been open a little over three months, and it would be difficult to overstate the positive impact it has had on our community.

When the second house opened, we didn't simply add more people to the property;

we added more friends and partners in our work. This has resulted in a shift in the energy of the community. There's a positivity that's evident from the moment both houses meet outside each morning to start farming together. That energy works its way into everything we do.

One of most powerful changes to witness is how the second home has increased the independence of our residents.

Creating spaces for our residents where they could act independently yet still be safe was something that was difficult before. Now, when Bar wants to work on a baking project with Merle, one of the coworkers next door, he lets us know and walks right over to Aurora House to find her.

My favorite part of each day is when both houses gather around the huge farm table at Aurora House, join hands to bless the meal, and share

a communal lunch. With so many people around the table everyone can relax in their own way, whether it's sitting next to someone they haven't seen all day to catch up, telling the group a story from the morning, or just sitting quietly and listening to the chatter. The whole group has only been together a few months, but it feels like the start of something special, like this is something we'll be doing for many years to come.

## Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds (and Dignity)

by Michael Staub, father of resident Lucy Staub



My daughter Lucy turns 22 later this winter, and two decades ago—when she was first diagnosed as brain damaged and unlikely ever to lead an independent life—I never dared to think what her adulthood would look like. The fear and the anxiety were too great. My first-born child was just so fragile and vulnerable. As she grew up, Lucy could not learn to communicate more than her most basic needs or reliably perform even rudimentary self-care tasks. Her

schools in Michigan (where Lucy was born) had little clue what to do with her—or for her. And meanwhile Lucy's medical diagnoses continued to pile up: autism and gastrointestinal disorders and cerebral palsy and epilepsy....

Lucy is the first resident at the newest addition to High Spirit: Aurora House. Her talented and dedicated houseparents, Aly and Troy, have been awesome (and awe-inspiring). They have worked hard to crack the

complex and often mysterious code that is Lucy. Everyone at High Spirit has done more than I ever could have dreamed to create a nurturing environment where my daughter can finally thrive. Largely due to these efforts, Lucy is today a transformed young woman: active and alert, decisive and determined, cheerful and curious. Words cannot express what it means to see Lucy doing so well. What High Spirit has given my daughter is a truly dignified existence.



## Remembering Heather Adams

Heather Adams, mother of our community member Rory, passed away in August following a long illness. Heather lived her life fully, working tirelessly to promote the rights of people with disabilities around the world, while also supporting and advocating for the needs of her beloved son Rory.

Heather and Mark Adams designated High Spirit to receive any gifts given in her honor. Below is a list of the many friends, family, coworkers and businesses who have given generously to High Spirit in tribute to Heather.

Chris Agar  
Steve and Giddy Akers  
Jim and Muguette Alder  
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Sofia Villax  
Charles Warren and  
Katherine Kimball  
Hank Watkins  
Alicia Yamin  
Kathleen Yazbak

**Thank you all. Your gifts have strengthened High Spirit at a time of growth and of need.**

*If you see errors or omissions, please contact us.*



Heather, Mark and Rory Adams planting an apple tree at High Spirit



Clockwise from upper left: Johnny, Mark, Rory and Jessica Adams

## Recommended Reading

*The Siege, A Family's Journey into the World of an Autistic Child*  
by Clara Claiborne Park

We recently re-read this beautiful memoir, first published in 1967, when autism was little known or understood. Dr. Benjamin Spock says, "This is the...story of how a devoted mother, refusing to be discouraged, has accomplished miracles in fostering the intellectual, social and emotional development of her

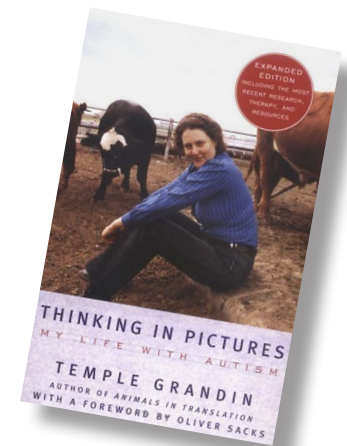


autistic daughter." Our board member, Martha Bedell, knew Jesse park, the daughter of two professors, when she was at Williams College. As an adult, Jesse has become well known for her brilliantly colored and meticulous paintings. Photos of Jesse's work can be seen at:

<http://www.purevisionarts.org/artists/jessica-park/>

**Also recommended:**

*Thinking in Pictures, My Life with Autism*  
by Temple Grandin



## High Spirit Donors

Thanks to all of you who gave and supported High Spirit between November 1, 2015 and November 1, 2016. Your gifts are profoundly supportive and deeply appreciated.

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*Note: Please contact the office with any errors or omissions. Thanks!*

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