



NEWS

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**Campbell Road IRA Staff Forges
Success with Consumer Charlie Fox**

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Campbell Road IRA manager
Carol Laninger and consumer
resident Charlie Fox

ITHACA – Struggling to consistently express himself effectively. Frustrated trying to move to and fro while confined in a wheelchair most of the day. At times somewhat aggressive to staff and consumers.

To say the least, Charlie Fox’s situation as a full-time resident of Unity House’s Tompkins County MRDD Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) site at 429 Campbell Avenue in Ithaca, NY presented challenges for himself, his fellow resident consumers, and the site’s dedicated staff when he returned there some 13 months ago.

An Ithaca area native, Charlie came back to the site and program manager Carol Laninger and her staff in October 2007 after an 18-month stint at nearby Lakeside Nursing Home, where he was admitted in March 2006 to rehabilitate a broken leg. That injury was caused by Charlie’s Pagets Disease, which interrupts normal bone remodeling and instead creates new bone growth that is softer and more fragile than normal bone and that also develops in haphazard patterns, leading to frequent bone fracture.

“Charlie came back to us wheelchair-bound and I’d say somewhat depressed,” remembers Laninger, who has managed the Campbell IRA site program for two and one-half years now.

“The injury and less attention to addressing his developmental disability over time as he

recovered from the injury, the wheelchair restriction, and the extensive medication regimen combined to somewhat stall Charlie and challenged our goal of empowering him to progress and become more independent.”

Charlie’s specific behavior at the time included resistance to programming, a lack of interaction characterized by a refusal to communicate his needs and wants, and expressing any emotions aggressively and in an unacceptable manner, said Laninger. His three-times-a-day prescribed medication regimen totaling up to 13 pills in the morning alone and additional medication during the day also seemed to be contributing to his behavior, she adds.

A true challenge? Yes. Impossible to change? Not for Laninger and her staff, who relished working with Charlie and whose efforts to date have regenerated him physically and emotionally to the point where his future knows no bounds.

“My staff and I are a very, very committed group and there’s no way we weren’t going to turn around Charlie,” grins Laninger, an Elmira, N.Y. native whose 20 years of experience in human services includes working in the child welfare field and who returned to Ithaca to work with adults with developmental disabilities after a brief relocation to the southern U.S. “We came up with a comprehensive Individual Service Plan for him highlighted by a tight daily structure. The plan incorporated a six-week drug holiday after Charlie began refusing medication regularly, and upon collaborating with his medical caretakers. Those factors and the staff’s execution of our plan have turned Charlie into one loveable, independent consumer who is the pride of our program.”

Laninger emphasizes that stopping Charlie’s consumption of prescribed medications and an almost religious adherence to his daily structure, featuring time spent three days a week in the agency’s Ithaca Day Habilitation program and nonstop staff support, have been key to his vast

improvement and will remain vital to maintaining what he has gained. Those gains include the restoration of Charlie's agility and the loss of over 60 pounds upon the staff's encouragement and Charlie's adoption of a 'No Seconds Diet.'

"Charlie still gets his coffee, which along with Disney movies he absolutely loves and which he also previously overspent on," laughs Laninger. "Now he is very responsive to encouragement for healthy snacks and at times, instead of buying his coffee, he makes it himself. And he's on a budget as a component of his daily structure, a budget he helps make with staff that prevents him from overspending for coffee or the movies. He plans his budget one time a week and discusses it daily with staff. He actually checks out articles for sale in the papers that he might like to buy or continue to save for and buy when he can afford them. He also saves for upcoming events like the special day trip we'll be taking to New York City to see Radio City Music Hall and the Rockettes perform. This alone is an awesome attainment for Charlie."

The IRA staff's plan and hard work carrying it out and supporting Charlie have led him to abandon his wheelchair and walker all together.

"He walks unaided to our mail box each day and gets the newspaper and also walks unaided for all current activities, including personal outings like going to the movies with his brother, who lives in Ithaca," says Laninger. "He loves to participate in any thing and every thing that's suggested to him, whether it's to go and see, go and do, or just plain go to."

"Charlie also goes with staff to races, concerts, fairs, parties, or football games, and even attends house events like trips to Darien Lake amusement park," she adds. "He just finished ten weeks of bowling, participates now with staff and other consumers in a variety of agency-wide activities (kickball, waffle ball, relay races) held Thursday nights, and does his own laundry."

Simultaneous to all this interaction has been Charlie's renewed interest in using his communication books and growing vocabulary to communicate.

"He now tries consistently to repeat phrases to improve his speech," beams Laninger. "And he will patiently express himself to whoever is listening to him."

Charlie has progressed so far that in his recent service plan review it was determined that it would be within his current capacity to have his participation in day habilitation increased to five days a week. That review also generated a discussion about the possibility of employing Charlie at Challenge Industries in Ithaca, where he had worked before.

"The staff and I love working with consumers like Charlie," Laninger says. "Charlie sure didn't smile very much when he came back a little over a year ago. Now he's smiling most of the time every day. And that smile and his 360-degree turnaround are a tribute to Charlie's willingness to change and the fact that he responded to the consistent structure developed for him here by the Campbell Avenue IRA staff."