

2016 Campaign Success Stories

The Arc of Evansville

Connections For Life Program –

Kayla's progress is our success story for the Connections For Life program at The Arc of Evansville. Studies indicate individuals with disabilities face many barriers.

She has become an integral part of her community by volunteering for several local organizations. Kayla seeks out organizations that are interesting to her and establishes volunteering opportunities. Kayla's increased interest in the agency assists her in building relationships with others.

A perfect example is Gentiva Hospice. While volunteering here, Kayla completes office duties and helps put together memory books for the patients of Gentiva. The books are theme based (i.e. pets, cars, flowers, etc.) using magazine photos. The memory books help to prompt conversations with the patients. Kayla enjoys making crafts and sharing them with the individuals at Gentiva. She regularly gives the patients cards and holiday posters. Around the Christmas holiday, Kayla makes ornaments and baked cookies to share with the patients and to spread some holiday cheer.

Because Kayla cares about the well-being of others, she took the initiative to form a year-round walking class that seems to grow each week. The class walks at Washington Square Mall when the outside weather is bad. She is actively working on her own health and attends a weight loss class provided by the Vanderburgh County Health Department. This inclusive opportunity allows Kayla to participate in a community activity alongside individuals without disabilities. Kayla participates with a specific goal in mind – improve individuals' health.

Kayla is participating in social, education, and recreational activities in her community and her quality of life has been enhanced by increased social interaction and developing new friendships. Kayla is working toward reaching her full potential in life.

Child Life Center Program –

Ben is a four year old child, who began receiving services from The Arc of Evansville's Child Life Center (CLC) in August, 2014. At that time, Ben used scripted speech and experienced difficulty responding to simple questions. He was easily distracted and unable to feed himself. Ben also exhibited a low frustration tolerance which resulted in aggressive behavior towards his peers. CLC teachers and Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation therapists worked together to employ occupational therapy, speech therapy, and sensory strategies for Ben.

Over time, the strategies helped Ben improve in a variety of areas. He has experienced improvement in his attention to task, is able to follow the classroom routine, participates in circle time, and interacts with his peers. He often participates in pretend play with his friends and loves to use his imagination while playing with ocean animals. In addition, Ben's expressive vocabulary has greatly increased. He now has extensive conversations with his peers, teachers, and therapists. Some of Ben's favorite topics to talk about include: Skylander Giants and Minecraft. Ben is now able to feed himself and is willing to try new foods. During our re-evaluation process, it was determined that Ben has progressed to the point that he will no longer need services when he enters into kindergarten in the fall. Ben is on his way to reaching his full educational potential.

Day Services Program For Adults –

Belinda Jackson started services with The Arc of Evansville in March of 2015. Belinda states that she is able to express her ideas more effectively, and that peers and staff will listen to her input. She uses her unique perspective and skills to affect the daily routine. Belinda reads books and articles regarding current events, his-

torical events, and research to her peers and leads group discussions. She believes she has become increasingly creative through Day Service projects and activities. Belinda enjoys art activities and often assists peers with projects either physically or verbally. “I have developed my own vision on how to design my own projects and can independently proceed on them. I can go a step further and enhance projects in ways I did not think about before.”

Belinda prides herself in her ability to pinpoint and handle issues faced by people with disabilities. She is aware of available resources and is willing and able to educate her peers. Belinda is a member of a self advocates group through The Arc of Evansville called SWAG- Southwestern Advocacy Group. Self advocates speak out and educate for equal rights, respect, and inclusion for all in the community. She attributes the organization to expanding her knowledge about her community, and believes she can educate others in the community through her work with the SWAG. Finally, Belinda volunteers her time at local organizations. She works along with her staff in building contacts with local organizations and points out new possibilities for volunteer sites. She currently volunteers at The St. Vincent Center for Children and Families, the Evansville Rescue Mission, and Parkview Nursing Facility. While at St. Vincent Center for Children and Families, Belinda reads, plays, sings, and dances with the children.

Belinda engages in healthy behaviors while working towards building relationships, gaining independence, and achieving her full potential.

Albion Fellows Bacon Center

My success story is that of Brenda. She entered shelter on September 29th, 2015, with her 13 month old daughter, Brianna. Brenda reported no familial support system other than that of her abuser. In fact, she named her mother as one of her abusers, “for all of 21 years.” Her listed abuser’s family helped to babysit and offered her monetary and emotional support that she did not readily receive from her own parents. She was very honest from the initial intake regarding the fact that she believed that things would “work out.” Brenda had hoped that her entry into shelter would be a “lesson,” (as well as a place where she could be safe), from her abuser. Her hope was that he would change and cease the need to control her. Like many survivors of dating violence, Brenda minimized some of the trauma that she had endured. For example, she stated at intake that, “he only choked me out one time.” She did not acknowledge being placed in a choke-hold restraint as violent. Brenda reported that she had never attempted many things independently during her entire life. As girls that have witnessed violence often do, she learned to be a “people pleaser,” and made life choices according to the desires of others from whom she sought approval.

While in shelter, she opened up and began to attend groups. During a case management meeting, the cycle of violence, abuse dynamics and issues that commonly occur within the survivor, were discussed. Brenda learned that a child living in a home and witnessing such violence is detrimental to the psyche of that child. One day, she appeared to make the connection between her relationship with her own mother and how that may have affected her worldview and subsequent life choices. She realized the responsibility that she had as a mother to her baby girl.

During her time here, staff witnessed Brenda blossomed into someone who grew comfortable letting her voice be heard. She found it easier to accept a compliment and to acknowledge her amazing strengths as a mother and as a woman. Brenda secured a job at a local restaurant and took pride in the fact that she began receiving extra hours because management recognized her work ethic. Before she left shelter, she spoke as if management could possibly be a long-term goal. She believed that could be possible.

Brenda and Brianna exited shelter after 38 days. Even though she had been offered a place to stay by her abuser and her abuser’s family...she chose to move into her own apartment with her daughter. When she exited, she exuded confidence and knew that she had worked hard and could take care of herself and her daughter. At Christmastime, staff spoke with Brenda. She was still living independently with her daughter at that time, approximately a month and a half past exit...violence free!

Ark Crisis Child Care Center

Janie (not her real name) first brought her daughter to Ark after being referred by her case manager at Albion Fellows Bacon Center. Janie had left her abusive husband and need to rebuild a new, safer life with her young daughter. She brought her daughter to Ark initially so she could go on job interviews and find a job to support her daughter, despite her limited skills.

Janie eventually found a job at a fast-food restaurant and continued to bring her daughter to Ark until she could save up enough money to afford a place to live and secure permanent child care. Janie's plan took an unexpected turn when her daughter got sick, and she had to stay home from work to care for her. Janie was fired from her job and was exhausted and frustrated, yet determined not to go back to her abusive relationship and to make it on her own. After the child was well, Janie brought the child back to Ark so she could find another job.

Eventually Janie found another job and called Ark to share the good news. When Janie arrived to pick up her daughter, she told the little girl that she found a new job that day. The little girl was so excited; she started jumping up and down and gave her mom a big hug. The little girl told each staff member she walked past as she left the building that her mom got a new job and she was so excited because it meant they could move out of the shelter and get a new place of their own.

Ark continued to care for the little girl until Janie could find new housing and find a permanent child care center for her daughter. It was amazing to see Janie's transformation over the period of several weeks. She first came to us scared and lost. Through the wonderful partnership between Ark and Albion, both agencies were able to provide the support Janie needed to build a new, safer life for herself and her daughter. Ark's thoughtful staff provided more than just a place to bring her daughter, they became champions for Janie as she struggled to become independent. By the time Janie and her daughter moved on from Ark, Janie was more confident, hopeful and happy about her future.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

One-to-One Youth Mentoring

Doug began mentoring his Little Brother, Jordan, in the fall of 2010. He was referred by his school where his teacher said Jordan had poor organizational, study, and social skills and didn't display appropriate behavior for his age. When we first met Jordan, he was 10 years old and said that he didn't have any dreams except to have a Big Brother.

Doug and Jordan began as a school-based match and had lunch together every week. After they ate they would often play basketball at recess. After two years, Doug said, "I can tell Jordan feels a lot more comfortable talking to me. He still carries a pretty heavy emotional load for a kid his age, but he is starting to talk more about it. Trust and communication have improved a great deal."

When Jordan and Doug transitioned into a community match, all Jordan wanted to do was go to the mall. Doug pushed it off many times; worried that Jordan would see some of his friends and want to hang out with them instead. Finally, Doug gave in and took Jordan to the mall. Jordan headed to a department store and after two rides on the escalator he told Doug he was ready to go. All Jordan wanted to do was ride an escalator because he never had before.

Throughout the course of their match, Jordan and Doug have been to several places like GattiTown, Sky Zone, the mall, and the movies. Though Jordan enjoyed arcades like GattiTown and Chuck E. Cheese at first, his interests have changed. They still enjoy going to see the latest superhero movie, but five years later Jordan's favorite activity is still to play basketball at the park with his Big Brother Doug.

Jordan was only ten when he was matched, and is now finishing up his first year of high school. Two or three years into the match, Doug was still unsure if Jordan had any sort of aspirations, especially because of his performance in school. However, in a recently discussion with Jordan, he told Big Brothers Big Sisters staff, "I'm going to college and I'm going to be the first one in my family to graduate from college."

This is not our success story because Jordan now gets straight As or has the best behavior record, but because Jordan and Doug have created a friendship that will last a lifetime. Doug is the one consistent person in Jordan's ever changing life and will continue to be for years to come. Though good behavior and excellent academic performance are ideal, Doug and Jordan have created a successful relationship that cannot be measured by a test score or behavior chart. Jordan now has someone in his life that he can turn to in times of distress, as well as someone with whom to share his successes.

We also wanted to share Doug's perspective on being a Big Brother to Jordan:

In 2010 I was matched with Jordan, a quiet fourth grader who lived in a duplex with his grandmother and primarily socialized with younger children on his street. Originally volunteering in the school-based program, I was looking for a way to break-up the workday and give back however I could. I was not especially confident in my ability to make a difference. Jordan was looking for the next link in a chain of supports that had come in and out of his life. Already having experienced foster care, numerous case managers, and a variety other school- and community-based supports, Jordan was hesitant to see me as anything other than the next temporary fix. Countless awkward conversations followed. With time, however, the awkwardness subsided, trust grew, and little by little we came to realize that the relationship was becoming something entirely different than what either of us had anticipated.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moments when I have realized the impact of my relationship with Jordan, and it is even more difficult to fully understand what changes have been the result of the match and what changes were coming anyway. When I met Jordan he was reclusive and socially awkward—throughout our relationship, Jordan has participated on his school's speech team and become actively involved at a community center. Early mentoring in our relationship involved basic hygiene practices—lately I try my best at guiding Jordan through romantic feelings toward the opposite sex. Jordan lacked ambition and academic focus when we met—over the years Jordan has been invited to take high school art classes as a middle schooler and has set a goal of being the first in his family to go to college. I am incredibly proud of the young man Jordan is becoming and I am humbled by the thought that I have helped him along his way.

Having Jordan in my life has made me a better person. I never would have guessed in 2010 that I would still be in Jordan's life as he celebrated his sixteenth birthday, or that he would have gotten to know my wife and kids. Jordan has a difficult life, and I wish I could say that our relationship magically eliminated all of the challenges he faces. Still, Jordan knows that I am a friend to lean on and we have developed a bond that gets stronger with each passing year. I do hope that I have changed Jordan's life for the better, forever, because he has certainly changed mine.

We demonstrate the impact of our programs on healthy youth development through our measured outcomes, but perhaps the greatest testimony to our success is what these relationships mean to our Littles. Jordan says, "People ask me who is the main person I look up to in my life and I say Doug. The reason why is because he is always there for me. Number one person I can talk to when I need someone to talk to. Doug is like a true brother to me that I never had."

The Boy Scouts

Boy Scouts/Venturing/Exploring –

Christopher, an 11-year-old Scout, went to the local fire department with his Boy Scout Troop to learn basic first aid. While they were there, they learned how to treat cuts, burns, tie tourniquets, and more.

Two weeks later, Christopher and his sister were heading to the bus stop. Their mother went to open the front door to watch them leave and as she did so the glass buckled and shattered. The broken glass cut her arm to the bone. Christopher and his sister heard their mother scream and ran back to help.

While his sister called 911, Christopher started treating his mother's wound. He applied a tourniquet and kept her calm as she slipped in and out of consciousness. Soon the ambulance arrived and took her to the hospital. One of the EMTs on the scene said that if Christopher had not applied the tourniquet his mother may have lost too much blood and died.

The mother had to undergo physical therapy, but is now doing well. Christopher was able to stay calm and save his mother because of the skills he learned in Scouting.

Cub Scouts –

Two brothers, Harley and Harrison, joined Cub Scouts in Newburgh as first graders which is the Tiger program and continued through to fifth grade to earn their Webelos badge and Arrow of Light awards. During those five years, the brothers attended Cub Scout Day Camp each year.

The younger brother, Harrison, suffers from Oppositional Defiance Disorder. Prior to joining Cub Scouts, he did not like to go outside and just really did not like doing anything according to his mother. During his time in Cub Scouts, he got to experience new activities, including Day Camp. After attending Day Camp, he became more willing to participate in all activities, especially activities in the outdoors. His mother said the boys loved the new experiences at Day Camp like archery and bb guns.

Now, both boys are in the Boy Scout program. Due to their great experience in Cub Scouts, they now volunteer as youth staff at Day Camp. The boys are now assisting other Scouts to ensure they have the same positive experience at Day Camp.

Outreach –

Scouts at Joshua Academy were less than cooperative at the beginning of the school year. The first meeting with this group was very challenging. Scouts were loud, talked back to authority, picked on each other, and were overall a rambunctious group. The Scout leadership was able to establish a rapport with the group quickly. Over the first couple of weeks, we introduced uniforms and began teaching the Scouts the Scout Oath and Law. The consistent meeting schedule and structured program quickly resulted in better behaviors. Scouts came in, put their uniform shirts on, and were much quicker to line up for the opening Pledge of Allegiance, Scout Oath, and Law. Then we would move on to a lesson plan for the day that was generally fun, interactive, and educational. When time allowed, we would have a few minutes for a game or free time at the end of the meeting. They began to learn that the better they listened, and the sooner they did as expected, the more likely they would receive the fun time at the end of the meeting.

After the first few meetings, a couple of the Scouts, Tim and Ricky, really showed improved behavior. As two of the boys who tended to be some of the more rambunctious in the group, they quickly transitioned to a leadership role. They came to the classroom early and wanted to help set up and prepare the room for the day's program. They helped to pass out uniforms and program materials as the other Scouts came into the room, and they were eager to be leaders in the group.

The group as a whole has shown tremendous improvement in attitudes and behavior at the weekly program. Scouts now encourage each other to participate, listen, and cooperate. The change in just one semester of program has been a welcome one, and is just one example of how our programs influence behaviors across the board at all of our after school programs.

The Boys and Girl's Club

Taylor is the oldest of five kids and lives with her father and stepmother. Her brothers and sisters actually started coming to the club before Taylor got involved. She has been a member of the club since October 2012. While Taylor enjoyed being at the club as a "kid", she also showed strong leadership qualities.

We quickly learned that Taylor could handle and enjoyed running tournaments for the staff, helping with activities for younger members and pretty much excelled at being in a leader. She had been named Youth of the Month numerous times and finally earned the Youth of the Year honor in 2014. Once Taylor turned fifteen years old, we began having her work for us at the club in a "staff" position. Not only is she a great BGC staff member, but she is also excelling in her daily school work and grades. We are very proud of the fine young lady that Taylor has become and look forward to watching what she will do with her future.

CASA

Every year in January, Vanderburgh County CASA hold our annual kickoff. Many times the Executive Director will discuss the previous statistics, how many new volunteers, how many children we served, how successful our fundraising events were etc. In addition we always have a theme and a short presentation to go with our theme. This year's theme was "Small Investments, Huge Returns." We were fortunate to have a previous CASA child who is now a successful 24 year old young woman come and speak to the 70 plus volunteers and staff that were in attendance. Terri shared her story which included her mother whom was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, her father whom she never knew, being originally removed from her mother's care at the age of 8 and growing up around heavy alcohol, drugs and misused medications. She lived in 6 different foster homes between the ages of 8-14. She always felt left out, hopeless and that she didn't matter. She changed schools a lot which meant she had to make new friends all the time. Her friends ended up being teachers, counselors and her CASA. She told the audience with tears in her eyes that the children in the foster care system and that the volunteers work with, may not seem to like or tell them that they appreciate your hard work, but please know that none of your efforts go unnoticed. One way the CASA can help these children in crisis is to make them feel like they matter. Terri's CASA did that for her and she feels like she wouldn't be where she is today if it wasn't for CASA. She remembers having so many people coming in and out of her life but when she saw her CASA, it really helped her in so many ways. She knew her CASA was there because she wanted to be – not because she was paid to be and to her that made a huge impact. Terri went on to be adopted, graduated from high school, earned an associate's degree in health care support and a bachelor's degree in health services administration from USI. Last summer she got married and her CASA was there at the reception to celebrate in another life event. Because of her positive experience, she hopes to be a CASA volunteer someday. She and her husband also plan to adopt and make a difference in a child's life.

Deaconess VNA Plus Home Health Care

A 59 year old male was referred to Deaconess VNA Plus for home care services. The patient was being discharged from a rehab hospital with a diagnosis of CVA (cerebrovascular accident) with left hemiplegia. The patient also had a diagnosis of diabetes, which had not been controlled prior to the stroke and he also had a pressure ulcer.

The patient had initially been recommended for nursing home placement, but his sister allowed him to come into her home to receive the home care services. With the help of the Deaconess VNA Plus home care team, the patient increased his functional status, his diabetes was brought under control and the pressure ulcer was healed.

The patient received skilled nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and home care aide services during the course of nine weeks. Deaconess VNA Plus nurses provided education to the patient and his sister on how to manage his diabetes, how to test his own blood sugar, and education on his medications. The skilled nurses also provided wound care and wound care education and the pressure ulcer was healed. The skilled nurses provided education to the patient's sister in order for her to be able to adequately assist in his care on a daily basis. The physical and occupational therapists provided and instructed on a home exercise program for increasing functional strength. They also provided instruction on adaptive equipment to aid in his care. The speech therapist provided exercises for strengthening his ability to swallow effectively and improving his speech. The home care aide provided assistance with personal care and aiding in his independence with his own personal care.

After nine weeks, the patient was discharged from Deaconess VNA Plus home care services with improved functional strength, controlled diabetes and knowledge of diabetes management, and the pressure ulcer was healed. The patient was able to transfer himself, ambulate with a walker and provide his own personal care. He and his sister were pleased with his progress, ability to regain independence and avoid placement in a nursing facility.

United Way funding was critical to our ability to serve this patient and his family.

Deaconess VNA cont.

For people who are chronically ill, the risk of repeated hospitalization is great. This is particularly true for rural patients, who often lack the ability to easily or quickly visit a doctor. With its “Heal at Home” program, Deaconess VNA Plus helps at-risk patients like these by providing equipment and education to self-monitor their chronic conditions between nursing visits. A program nurse “coach” calls each patient daily to discuss the self-monitoring results and determine the need for a medical intervention. This daily monitoring can make a critical difference. For example: a patient in her early 40’s is diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. She is married and has 2 children ages 6 & 16. Deaconess VNA Plus provided services to this patient for 60 days for metastatic breast cancer to her lung, liver and bone. She is oxygen dependent. Deaconess VNA Plus provided Physical Therapy to work with the patient to increase her strength at home so that she would be strong enough to continue with her chemo-therapy treatments. Deaconess VNA Plus also helped the patient with her depression and anxiety. Deaconess VNA Plus worked with the patient on pain management and helped her to wean off some of the morphine, which was a goal of the patient so she could be more “with it” for her children. The patient qualifies for hospice; however, she is not ready to discontinue her chemo-therapy treatments. Due to the chemo, her appetite is in decline, so Deaconess VNA Plus assisted her with nutrition and nutrient dense foods to help with weight gain. This patient benefited from the resources provided by the local United Way funds as she was uninsured at the time of treatment.

Lampion Center

Counseling Program

When “Jack” came to Lampion Center he was so full of anxiety and fear that he could barely come in the door. He was, at first, unable to even sit down in the lobby while he awaited his appointment time. Years of abuse, neglect and maltreatment from his early childhood led him to abandon his dysfunctional family in his early teen years and go out on his own. He survived by living on the streets and forming alliances with others. That led to involvement in gangs, drugs, and behavior that he could have never imagined of himself.

Several decades later he found Lampion Center. His life was at a low point and he was almost unable to function. Racked with fearfulness, guilt, anxiety, paranoia, and the constant effects of unresolved trauma, he came to us for help. Taking much time and great care, his therapist gradually gained “Jack’s” trust. Slowly the process of therapy began and “Jack” was able to start working through the trauma he had experienced through his very troubled life. “Jack” comes to Lampion Center weekly now. He’s slowly opening up about the past and working hard to tackle the issues from his childhood. He’s coming to terms with the fact that no child deserves to be treated the way he was. His therapist uses “Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing” (EMDR) to help process old, harmful memories and trauma triggers. He uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to test out beliefs about the safety of the world and those around him. Throughout the therapeutic process, “Jack” is also working on forgiveness—of others and himself.

A long way from the man we saw walking through the door on Day One, today, with the help of Lampion Center

Salvation Army

K.A.S.H. 4 Change

Sandy is a recent graduate of Knowledge, Accountability, Skills & Habits 4 Change (K.A.S.H.) 4 Change program and this is her story in her own words. "I will highly recommend and very much appreciate the K. A. S. H. 4 Change program.

The K .A .S .H. Program more than exceeded my expectations, not only have I been helped financially and materially but most of all spiritually. It has also enabled me to help and teach my 26 year old daughter various things that I have learned from the classes, my homework and from Bank on Evansville's financial education. This program to me has truly not only been a blessing to me but has allowed me to bless my daughter by passing on to her what I have learned from this program.

I am a 55 year old single female who because of this program have decided to pursue a career change by going back to college. The most important thing that this program has done for me is to help me with inner healing. I am so grateful. I am so thankful to Clay from Bank on Evansville, Jessica, and Gwen but most of all Leanne Hudson from Ivy Tech. She told me that I should be proud of myself for my accomplishments. I have not heard that in years and I will always keep her words in my heart.

Thank you for helping me to keep my head up and getting me on another path and for all you have done for me. But most of all for God, for using you to help me and my daughter. I pray that this program will continue to help others as much as it has helped me."

Spencer County Hospice

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

This success story is written by the son of one of Spencer County Hospice's founding members (we have permission to share). At the end, my mom wanted to die at home.

My dad tried his best to care for her, but soon the pain medication she was prescribed did nothing and he could not stand to see her in pain. He took her to the hospital where she stayed until she died, unable to see her 7-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter because hospital rules prohibited children from visiting.

1990, my dad helped found the Spencer County Hospice, the retirement project that he had been planning for years. Over the next 25 years he continually served on the board of directors, served various times as president and secretary, helped get grants and raise funds, and volunteered his time at both the office and as a respite caregiver. When I drove down to surprise him for his 89th birthday, I found dad working at the hospice office. Whenever dad would talk about my mom, he would often say how sorry he was that he couldn't take care of her when she was dying. It bothered him a lot. He mentioned it again last Wednesday during the last real conversation I had with him. He had become a hospice patient just two days before.

I thought my trip to see my dad on Wednesday would be the first of many visits that I would get to share with him over the 10 weeks that his doctor said he had left. However, the next morning I found myself in the role of caregiver instead of house-guest with his health rapidly deteriorated. When placed in the same shoes my dad had been in when caring for my mom, I was just as overwhelmed. If it had not been for hospice, my sister, brother-in-law, and I could not have taken care of him. The nurses and other staff that my father had worked with were there whenever we needed them, sometimes it seemed before I even hung up the phone. They provided the medical equipment and trained us on how to use it, instructed us on giving medication and other care, and professionally handled the emergencies that we couldn't. They were honest in letting us know what was happening and what was likely to happen. They provided emotional support and grieved with us.

Thanks to hospice my father was able to spend his last days at home with his family, without pain or discomfort. My sister and I always told dad that he never need any forgiveness from us for being unable to care for mom. I know our mom felt the same way and she told him so on that Sunday.

VOICES

Ellie was at her wits' end. Then, VOICES, Inc. gave this mom the help she needed for her daughter Marcy. Life with Marcy had never been easy, but Ellie had always managed. But now, well, Ellie just wanted to run away... the nursing home didn't listen or didn't care. She felt horrible. . . how could she even think about abandoning her only daughter? It wasn't Marcy's fault. But Ellie just didn't know what to do. Ellie sat down at her computer and did a Google search: Advocate for people in nursing homes. Amid the ads for the nursing homes she had come to distrust, she found VOICES, Inc. She called and spoke to Michelle for almost an hour. Where to begin? Michelle said to begin at the beginning. So Ellie did. Marcy was always a happy child. She was very bright and did well in school. In high school, she was a cheerleader, had lots of friends and never stayed home on a Saturday night. She went to college and did well, most of time. She started to have moods where she felt sad and hopeless for no apparent reason. Then she would soar with boundless energy and work all night. She graduated, got a good job, an apartment and a car. Ellie thought the moods had resolved or that Marcy was handling them better than in college. Truth was, Marcy just wasn't telling Ellie what was really going on. She was impulsive and made reckless decisions. She was fired for missing work. Then the bank repossessed her car and she lost her apartment. Marcy had no choice but to tell her mom.

Marcy was only 23 when she was diagnosed with Bi-polar Disorder and Schizophrenia. Her condition was so severe, she was admitted to the state hospital. Ellie cried when the psychiatrist said Marcy would never get out. She sobbed when he said Marcy would not live to see her 30th birthday. But Marcy proved them all wrong. She moved from the state hospital to a mental health group home. She got married. She moved out of the group home. She lived past 30.

Then she fell and broke her ankle. She needed help to recover so she went to a nursing home for rehab. When Marcy was about to be released, her husband of 10 years didn't want her coming back to live with him. Now she was in a nursing home on a long-term basis which really meant forever. Ellie agonized. She felt helpless as Marcy deteriorated. She developed diabetes, high blood pressure, thyroid disease and incontinence of bladder.

Now she had a horrible infection under both arms. The nursing home just couldn't, or wouldn't, give her the care she needed. Ellie had to find a different nursing home but how? Who should she talk to? What should she look for? How could she tell if another nursing home would be better?

Michelle told Ellie how to get Marcy out of her current situation. She explained how to check on licensing and government inspections. She told her what to look for when seeking a new place for Marcy. Ellie called Michelle two days later. She thought she had found a new place for Marcy and wanted to run it by Michelle. Other younger people were there, and she would have more access to the outdoors, and outdoor activities. Ellie was hopeful that Marcy would respond favorably. Michelle offered to visit Marcy too, and explain about the process of moving and see what she wanted to do. And, with Marcy's permission, Michelle would also address the infection with the Director of Nursing. The mother then thanked Michelle for talking to her last night. She said she had been suffering from nights sweats from worrying about her daughter, and last night she didn't have any. And all because of VOICES, Inc.

YMCA

For 10 weeks, these 13 Outreach participants, ranging from elementary to middle school, trained every Saturday for three hours. First they swam, then biked, then followed with miles of running. The group was led by a community volunteer, Brad, who constantly reminded the group that if it was easy, everyone would do it. He pushed the group, some of which could not swim one length of the pool, to do their very best with the primary goal of crossing the finish line. With the help of individual swim instruction, all of the participants completed the swim portion of the triathlon, which was a great accomplishment for the team.

This year's team was a committed group as evidenced by 90% of them attending an optional practice over spring break. This commitment was further solidified as they trained Saturday after Saturday encouraging others to swim farther, bike harder, and run farther. Their hard work and perseverance was aided by volunteers who encouraged them, including a dietitian who taught them how to eat smart and healthy the week before the event, adults who biked with them on the greenway and made they were safe, and board members and extended family who made posters and cheered the athletes on in the transition areas.

These 13 students could have stayed home on Saturday morning playing video games with friends; instead they trained for over 3 hours each day and became tri-athletes.

One in particular had to go the extra mile, literally. The Outreach group all checked in together and got their numbers painted on. As the age groups formed, Mahogany noticed she was not with her friends she had trained with but was with a group of older girls. Despite being able to go back and compete at her age level, she chose to stay with the older peers, saying she was okay with running the extra mile required to finish the triathlon in that group. Her volunteer mentor and fellow teammates met toward the end of the race, and the Outreach team ran the last 1/2 mile with her, providing the energy and motivation for her to sprint to the finish line.