



Press Release
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Dream Maker

Peak Community Services is the umbrella agency for Pulaski Developmental Services (PDS) in Winamac and Woodlawn Center in Logansport. Peak provides employment opportunities and vocational, educational, residential and supported living programs to adults diagnosed with a developmental disability. The agency serves Pulaski, Cass and surrounding counties.

In Pulaski County, PDS provides an array of services. Job placement and follow-along services (to build and maintain job skills) are provided, as well as supported employment. Consumers who cannot or prefer not to work in the community are given the opportunity to work in a non-competitive setting. Industrial subcontract work is performed and consumers are paid wages based on their productivity.

PDS also provides residential services, including group home living and supported living services. Supported living staff members provide assistance to consumers when they choose to live independently in their own apartment or home. Consumers enjoy recreational activities, including bowling, camping and dances, on a regular basis.

PDS also has a program called Adult Daily Living Skills. In this program, consumers achieve the kind of life about which they dream. The kind of life that most of us take for granted.

CARA BERKSHIRE: DREAM MAKER

Cara Berkshire has worked at Peak Community Services - at the PDS facility - for about two years. She IS the Adult Daily Living Skills program in Pulaski County. She provides an educational program that allows each consumer to grow and develop to his or her fullest potential. She develops goals for each consumer through a team approach. Peak provides person-centered programming, so Cara first works with the consumer to learn his or her dreams. She also works with other staff having contact with the consumer, the family and/or guardian, and other members of the community who provide support.

Cara updates goals for the consumer as often as necessary to keep up with growth, needs and desires. Her overall aim is to assist each consumer to achieve maximum independence at home, at work, and in the community. On a daily basis Cara seeks or makes the opportunities necessary for those dreams to come true.

Every morning when Cara arrives for work, excited consumers are waiting for her. Cara works on a schedule with each consumer, and every day she spends individualized time with one, two or three consumers. Some days are very specific. For example, one of her consumers just HAS to have coffee with "the ladies" on Tuesday mornings.

While Cara has a plan to work toward specific goals, the decision about how to spend the time is made by the consumer. If the consumer cannot make a decision, Cara may offer some suggestions. Once the consumer has made a decision, off they go. In the individual stories you will see how these outings relate to goals set in the Adult Daily Living Skills program.

Several times a week Cara conducts classes, or arranges for members of the community to teach a skill. She teaches exercise classes two days a week. She has worked with anger management, finances, computer skills, and basic skills like road signs, foods, colors, and numbers.

An example of a community partner is the Family Nutrition Program through Purdue University Cooperative Extension Services. Through this program, consumers learn healthy food choices, menu planning, shopping for food and nutritious cooking. Members of the local law enforcement community have come to PDS to teach safety and to build relationships. The Winamac Pet Med Center has offered to teach a pet care class.

Cara's role as Dream Maker is as varied and wonderful as the consumers having the dreams. With this article, we have included five dreamers.

DREAMER #1: KAREN

Karen loves to attend yard sales. You might wonder how this can be worked into a treatment plan. But you and I probably don't have the challenges that Karen faces every day. Even this can be a learning opportunity. Cara has used this desire to teach Karen about handling money, budgeting money, finding items for a reasonable price, and learning how to find her way around the community.

In order to go to a yard sale, Karen first has to find an advertisement for the sale in a newspaper. She then has to get a map of the community, locate the yard sale on the map, and tell Cara how to get there. Once there, it is Karen's responsibility to see if there is anything she wants or needs, determine if the price is a good one, and decide if her budget will allow this expense.

Karen also likes to go to the Oak Grove for coffee on Tuesday mornings. A group of women meet there regularly, and Karen has found friends and a safe environment to work on socialization skills. You and I may take going to a restaurant with friends for granted. Karen had to learn how to make small talk and when touching a friend is appropriate. Karen has established significant friendships through these morning get-togethers, something that two years ago would have been impossible for her.

DREAMER #2: MARGARET

When Cara met Margaret, Margaret would not look up at her. She went through life with both hands in front of her face, hiding from herself and the world around her. In the two years in which the two have worked together, Cara has established and modified one set of socialization goals. One goal was that Margaret would enter The Coffee Bean. She did, but for a long time, she entered so closely attached to Cara that they could have been Siamese twins. Once she could enter without fear, the goal was modified so that Margaret would enter The Coffee Bean first. Eighteen months later, Margaret walked into The Coffee Bean ahead of Cara. Cara then determined that Margaret should go into The Coffee Bean by herself and stay for 10 minutes. The goal was later modified that she would stay an hour. The current goal is for Margaret to find a ride, go in by herself, order, pay, enjoy her refreshments, and then leave.

In this particular instance, the staff at The Coffee Bean and the regular morning customers

have been of invaluable assistance to Margaret in her growth. They treat her like a friend, they stop by and ask how she is, and - most importantly - they have gotten involved in Margaret's pet project: the PDS Library.

Margaret's real dream is to be a librarian. (She used to work at the Pulaski County Public Library on the maintenance staff.) She has gathered books, ordered them on shelves in the community room, and set up a lending system. Her library - largely through donations of her coffee house friends - includes cookbooks, romance novels, children's books, movies and music. One of her coffee house friends - Steve Miller - has offered his business (Miller's Ladies Store) as a drop-off point for library donations. If you have anything you believe to be appropriate for Margaret's library, you may take them to Miller's, and Steve will make sure they get to Margaret.

DREAMER #3: TAMMY

Tammy is a personal shopper. If you have a shopping need, Tammy can fill it. Through this she learns how to make and follow a list, how to budget money, how to find items in various kinds of stores, and how to communicate with a wide variety of individuals.

Tammy's dream - her deepest desire - is to care for animals. Her father used to keep many animals around the house, but after he passed away, her mother could not maintain their care. Tammy would like to groom, walk, feed and water - or just play with - any type of animal. It could be a cat, dog, goat, horse or pony (her favorite), or anything that lives and breaths but isn't human. So far, while Cara has found many one-time opportunities for Tammy, she has not been successful finding a regular "gig" in which Tammy could get to know the animal and develop a relationship. If you have a burning desire to help, please call Cara about this.

DREAMER #4: JAMIE

Jamie is a caregiver. Her dream is to find a meaningful volunteer position in a day care or day care home. While she has difficulty staying focused on meeting her own needs, she nurtures and teaches consumers who have more profound challenges than she. She has learned how to use a computer, and she works with other consumers who have not learned that skill. She helps others with puzzles and other games, as well as daily living activities. She wants to work with children, but Cara has not been able to develop this resource.

Cara has a plan for Jamie as well. When Jamie is helping someone else, she is completely focused. When she is making a decision for herself, she is scattered and indecisive. Cara's current goal with Jamie is that she make a decision and not change that decision for at least one day. For example, when it is Jamie's turn to have an outing, she may change her mind several times before the vehicle leaves the parking lot. Cara, doing one step at a time, is teaching Jamie to make one decision and stick with it through the door, into the vehicle, while they are driving, and once they arrive.

DREAMER #5: RANDY

Of all the consumers with which Cara works, Randy has the most profound challenges. A consumer diagnosed with Down Syndrome, Randy does not verbalize when he

communicates. He has difficulty thinking “outside himself” or thinking of others around him. For example, Cara is teaching Randy to open doors for others. When they leave the building together, she takes the longest route, the route that includes going through three doors. It has taken Randy a long time to understand what it means to open a door and stand aside to let another pass through.

When Cara started to work at Peak, Randy would not go anywhere with her. For a full year, Cara would stop at his table in the workshop, ask him if he wanted to go somewhere or do something, and he would not communicate with her. He has been going places now for a year, and at this time, he will go whenever he is asked. He particularly likes to go for rides in a car and to drink iced tea at The Coffee Bean.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

There are many ways in which members of the community can help these dreamers’ dreams come true. The first and most important way is to have an open and accepting spirit. When you see us, before considering our differences, consider our similarities. If you see us at the same place on a regular basis, introduce yourself. Get to know us and join our circle of friends.

There are other, more tangible ways as well. Can you offer volunteer opportunities that would help us, and at the same time benefit you and your customers? Do you have books, movies or music tapes and CD’s that would help fill out our library? (Hint: if you would like to give something for the library, consider children’s books or family-oriented movies. Consumers also like action films.) Do you have animals at your home or business that could use weekly care and attention? Do you have some time to join or start a “coffee club”? Do you have other ideas?

Peak Community Services and the consumers receiving services are an integral part of this community. We live here and we work here. We dream here. We are more like you than you ever thought possible. Please help Peak - through Cara and all the staff at PDS - to be the best Dream Makers they can be.

If you see an opportunity, call Cara Berkshire at (574) 946-6188.