



## *Press Release*

*January 2004*

### *BSTP Program Brings Rewards*

BSTP staff work together in a program that is tough, but rewarding. From 8:30 until 2:30, they spend time with 12 consumers who have profound challenges ranging from autism to the dual diagnosis of MI/DD (both mentally ill and developmentally disabled). For several months, they also worked with a consumer diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

All of the consumers currently in the program come to Peak from group homes operated by the Mentor Network (formerly REM). Most had previously been institutionalized in a state facility. For these individuals, BSTP provides an enhanced quality of life, a break in the routine of institutional living, and some individual attention, at least for part of the day.

Like all consumers, these consumers have individual goals to attain. Their goals may be smaller, but they are just as important.

For example, many are learning how to pull out a chair for themselves at the table (and how to return it to the table after use). Some are learning how to set up a table for dining. Some are working at taking their own items out of their lunch boxes, and others are learning how to work independently on academic activities.

Some even go to Peak's sheltered workshop to "work" at simple tasks. For this, they are "paid" with rewards from BSTP staff, but the simple joy of "going to work" is infectious. Many ask to go to work several times a day.

This idea of "asking" to do something is also a chore for most BSTP clients. Communication is an art form for the consumers and for the staff. Verbalization is almost non-existent. Common methods of communication are a simple form of sign language, some small words, gestures, eye contact, and communication books. Several times throughout the year BSTP staff hold communication classes for the consumers, teaching or reinforcing the simple signs or the use of communication books. (For those that are not familiar with the book concept, it is a picture book, generally personalized for the user, that allows the user to point to a picture depicting a want or a need. For example, a user can point to a picture of a glass of water or a restroom facility. This allows for quick interpretation of requests.)

For BSTP staff, the work day is non-stop. Their "lunch hour" is spent with the consumers, helping them to eat lunch. Their "breaks" are taken in the hallways and other areas of the building, as they take consumers around for some individual time and attention. They continually need to spend one-on-one time with somebody, while at the same time making sure that everyone else is occupied with a task or project, doing several loads of laundry a day, making incidental case notes, assuring that consumers who need bathroom breaks are getting them, and helping consumers change clothes following accidents. The end of their day is always the same: they sit together at one of the tables, making case notes and talking about the successes - and the pitfalls - of the day.

This program is about 13 years old. Some of the consumers have been coming to Peak for

that period of time. When asked if they like coming here, staff honestly has to say that they “think” the consumers enjoy their time here. With limited communication skills, they are forced to guess at such elusive concepts as feelings and dreams.

But that notwithstanding, there have been many successes.

- “Hank” has increased his socialization skills. He now interacts with his peers and even jokes and teases with them.
- “Sherry” now makes good eye contact. She smiles at others and approaches people on her own rather than waiting for others to approach her.
- “Angela” works independently now. When she first came to the program, she would sit and stare at academic projects. Now she tackles the projects on her own, learning as she goes.
- When playing catch, “Jim” wouldn’t pass the ball to others before. He would get the ball and keep it to himself. He now plays catch with others.
- “George” used to let the ball hit him in the chest rather than try to play. He now catches the ball when it is thrown to him.
- “Tony” used to hide in the bathroom all day. He now stays in the room and socializes with his peers and with staff.

To a person, the BSTP staff will say what the beginning of this article said. This is a tough job, but a rewarding one. They consumers with whom they spend their days are special, and worth the effort.

*This article was prepared with the assistance of Theresa Hamilton, Kathy Rhody and Karla Kreighbaum, BSTP staff members.*

### **HOW THE COMMUNITY CAN BECOME INVOLVED**

The BSTP program staff are always looking for ways in which to involve consumers in academic programs. Donations of games that teach eye/hand coordination skills, or that involve choosing colors or shapes and sizes would be appreciated.

The tables in the rooms have been donated. They are large, collapsible round tables. While they are sturdy and functional, they are not “pretty,” and they are heavy and difficult to move. Light weight, collapsible but sturdy large round tables would be appreciated.

We have run out of locker space for the consumers to place coats and changes of clothing. Full-size stand-alone lockers would be welcomed.

### **AGENCY INFORMATION**

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