

One Year Later...A Look at MDS' "Home of Their Own" Project

For several weeks leading up to the opening of three new group homes for people previously residing in the Grand Junction Regional Center Skilled Nursing Unit, emotions ran high. Some people thought the new model Mesa Developmental Services was proposing, serving people with very complex medical needs in eight resident home settings, would never work.

One of MDS' strategies for success was to hire people from the Grand Junction Regional Center who had long term relationships with the people making the move. The fact that familiar staff moved with them helped immensely during the moves and continues to be an important element today.



Kim Noblitt was a nurse for many years at the Regional Center and is now the supervisor of nursing for all three new homes. "The guys are doing great," Noblitt said about the individuals residing in the new homes. "It was an amazing challenge and I feel we've made very positive progress. Getting our teams trained and learning about the people they would be supporting was the greatest challenge from my standpoint but it's all come together." Fifty-one people were hired to staff the new homes.

It is not uncommon for people with significant disabilities to have legal guardians who are not family. Fred Burmeister retired from the Regional Center after 29 years as the Program Services Director. He



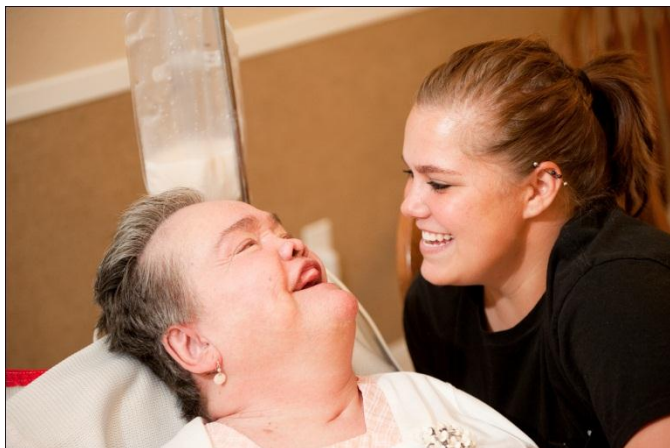
became a guardian for Ernie five years ago. "I knew Ernie would have to make a move but I had a lot of misgivings," Burmeister said. "I was concerned about his ability to adjust. Quite the opposite happened. He's thriving on the more casual, relaxed and home environment. I'm glad he's there and I guess the biggest change was the one I needed to make in myself!"

Tom Lambert is another example of someone who has been on both sides. He is a case manager with MDS who worked at the Regional Center for 22 years. Tom is currently the case manager for residents in two of the new homes and has known those individuals for years. "It was a daunting task; the paint wasn't even dry when we started moving in!" Lambert said with a laugh. "Taking that many people all at once seemed impossible but we pulled it off. It was a huge effort on a lot of people's part. I was glad to be involved. MDS pulled themselves up by the bootstraps and did what they had to do."

"From my perspective," Lambert continued, "everyone is happy and content. Their social and emotional lives are enriched and they have more opportunities for self-expression (in the new environment.) All of the guardians I have talked to have nothing but kind words to say about MDS."

One of those guardians, Bev Dill from Delta, is also the sister of Judy, a resident who, unlike most, can articulate her feelings. Dill says that originally she was quite concerned about the move because Judy was doing well at the Regional Center. Dill calls Judy every night and says that she feels Judy is happy and has adjusted well. “I was surprised,” Dill continues. “Everyone (MDS and Regional Center) have bent over backwards. They’re all good staff that really care. It was a good move for Judy and I’m glad I

made the right choice. “



Judy, pictured at left, has her own opinions about her new life. Although her speech is difficult to understand, her big smile when asked how she likes her new home speaks volumes. She was very clear that she likes her new home and is especially happy to have her own bedroom, which she did not have previously. She also likes to come to MDS’ main building two days a week, where she participates in activities with a different group

of people than her housemates. She really likes going out in the community, especially to the mall!

Connie and Dennis Brady are regular participants in their son Tyler’s life (Tyler is pictured right) and are frequently onsite at his home. They describe the new homes as “a work in progress.” “MDS is to be commended for stepping up to build these homes and take on a large group of people with multiple needs.” Mrs. Brady said. “They rose to the challenge and any concerns or questions Dennis and I have are handled quickly and effectively.” The Bradys also stated how appreciative they are of our community and our legislators for their support during the past several months.



Crystal Martinez, who worked four years at the skilled nursing unit and now rotates as a direct support professional through all three houses said “I really think one reason they’re doing so well is that now they have more one-on-one attention, they like the homey feeling and they get out so much more than they did at the Regional Center.” She points out that at the Regional Center they shared transportation with other programs, which limited their opportunities to leave the campus.

MDS Vice President of Community Residential Supports Joan Levy, who has overseen the opening of the homes, the staffing and the ultimate moves said, “It was a significant and steep learning curve for everyone. There was lots of up-front training but the real test was actually doing it ... getting to know

the people. I think now we have a clear understanding of their needs and wants so we can better fulfill their desires. We've gotten past the fundamentals of their care and are now addressing how to enhance their quality of life."

Levy concluded, "It was so beneficial to have people from the Regional Center help, both those who still work there and those who came to work for MDS. We've all worked really hard to retain the support systems they had previously. We will maintain this open door policy."