

## Going the distance, changing lives.

### Building Relationships, Embracing Autism: A Story of Aaron Stubbs, Spurwink and CMP

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Nick Vermette, CMP Safety Specialist and Paul Karkos, CMP Line Worker, on the job with Aaron Stubbs, a Spurwink client.

When Aaron Stubbs arrived at Spurwink's Staff Secure Program in Brunswick in 2005, he was withdrawn, non-communicative and violent. "He could be verbally abusive and violent," said Betsey Davis, a Spurwink Speech-Language Pathologist. "He kept everyone at a distance."

As it turns out, Aaron felt defined by his disability, Aspergers Syndrome, a disorder on the autism spectrum. He knew he was different and didn't understand why or how. He had been frequently told he was bad and he believed it.

Things began to change for Aaron when he realized that his Spurwink team of professionals was not going to give up on him no matter what he did. "He began to form relationships with just a few people," Betsey said.

With Betsey's help, Aaron, who is very bright, began to learn all that he could about his disability. As his understanding grew, his personality and demeanor changed dramatically. "Aaron became a totally different kid," Betsey explained.

Around the same time, Aaron also expressed a passion for anything related to CMP (Central Maine Power). During the

last holiday season, Liz and Brian King, a Spurwink Therapeutic Couple who work in the residential program where Aaron resides, decided to try to procure a CMP t-shirt for Aaron as a special gift. In the process, they were introduced to Nick Vermette, a CMP Safety Specialist. Nick heard of Aaron's enthusiasm for all things CMP and met the teen. He gathered a collection of CMP gear for Aaron, and in a short time, the two had bonded.

With the permission of CMP, Nick began to take Aaron out on jobs with him so he could observe what the workers do. "I got to see a lot of different things," Aaron said. "They treated me like one of the guys."

Aaron continues to get together with Nick twice a month. He has attended CMP employee events and has met Nick's family.

As the relationship with Nick developed, Brian and Liz King began to notice that Aaron blossomed even further.

"Aaron used to be uncomfortable talking to people he didn't know," Liz explained. "Now he initiates conversations, asks people about themselves, he's more confident and more independent. "I don't think Nick realizes the difference he has made. Aaron's personality has come alive."

"It's nice to be able to work with Aaron and help him make the social adjustments he needs to make," Nick said. "At the end of the day I probably learn as much as he does."

These days, Aaron has something he's never had in his life until now – hope. One of his hopes is to work for CMP when he leaves Spurwink and graduates from high school in June 2009.

Aaron's incredible progress is a great example of one of the cornerstones of treatment at Spurwink - the power of relationships to create change in one's life. There is no

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# Spurwink

# Leadership Message

## Perspective – It’s How You Look At It!

**Dawn Stiles, LCSW, Spurwink Services President**

I’ve been thinking about perspective a lot recently. Of course the political season quickly comes to mind. But that’s not the cause for my contemplation.

The University of Pennsylvania recently published a study entitled, “An Uncertain Revolution: Why the Rise of a Genetic Model of Mental Illness Has Not Increased Tolerance.” The Canadian Medical Association has also recently published results from a survey that details the public perception of those with mental illness. While research has clearly made the link between genetics and some forms of chronic mental illness, the perception continues to hold that “bad character” is responsible for the behaviors that are occasional symptoms of untreated mental illness continues. The two publications document the troubling fact that the stigma surrounding mental illness has not diminished.

The public’s perception of mental illness affects Spurwink and our world community on two levels: through discrimination and human rights violations which occur on a daily basis to individuals, and the difficulty of organizations that represent and/or provide treatment for individuals with mental illness to rally public support from those not already connected to the cause.

So how do we change the public perception of mental illness? By sharing our stories with our friends and neighbors, by taking a risk to speak out about how mental illness has touched our own or a loved one’s life. Then change will come, one person at a time.

Two of the articles you will find in our newsletter this month illustrate the miracles that can happen when individuals move beyond the common public perception of mental illness.

One is the story about Aaron, a young man who is a resident in one of our programs. Aaron, himself, was the victim of “public perception” about his own developmental disability. As he learned about his disability and was surrounded by caring professionals who gave him unconditional positive regard, he began to accept himself. What happened next illustrates the power of relationships - an accidental meeting led to a friendship with Nick Vermette, a supervisor at Central Maine Power. The friendship and connection from a member of the community helped Aaron to overcome his perception that he had a disability and to view his difference as a strength and not a limitation.

In our metaphorical story of Charlie the cat, you will learn how some clients come to Spurwink - sick, drug-addicted, homeless and often hopeless. But once again, due to the unconditional positive regard offered by our team of dedicated professionals at Portland Help Center, lives have been restored and self-respect regained. It’s really about the power of relationships to change lives – this is the philosophy upon which all treatment at Spurwink is built.

As a society we tend to fear that which we don’t know or understand. But you can see when you look at the picture of Charlie the cat, the aphorism holds true: beauty really is in the eye of the beholder. Let’s all practice looking at things from another perspective.



## Child Maltreatment Conference A Huge Success!

Spurwink Services extends our gratitude and appreciation to the generous sponsors of this year’s Northern New England Conference on Child Maltreatment held September 11 and 12 at the Wyndham Portland Airport Hotel.

The conference was attended by 165 professionals from throughout Maine who work with abused or neglected children. We appreciate our sponsors commitment to helping us build healthy communities.

A BIG thank you to the following:

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doubt that Aaron’s outlook on life has been transformed. He now considers Autism to be a blessing, rather than a curse.

“I like to put pressure on my disabilities by challenging myself in different situations,” he said.

Betsey Davis is ecstatic. “Today, Aaron embraces his Autism,” she stated. “He attends vocational school, holds down a job and is extremely social. He continues to amaze me every day.” ■

## A Cat for the Clinic

When Charlie arrived at Spurwink’s Portland Help Center, she fit the criteria for services at the downtown psychiatric clinic. She had little or no resources. She was suffering the psychiatric effects of long-term drug addiction and neglect. She was fearful and withdrawn. There was just one concern: Charlie was a cat.

When Catherine Lorello-Snow, a registered nurse and Director of Portland Help Center, heard about Charlie, she instinctively felt: “This cat needed to come to Portland Help.”

Charlie’s owner was a patient of the clinic. The patient was living in a shelter and needed to find a new home for Charlie, who had lived with him for months in a crack house. To make it worse, the house had also been inhabited by two German Shepherds which forced Charlie to sequester herself in a small closet. The experience was traumatic; the drug-filled environment had both mental and physical effects on the cat.

In February, Mary Devou, the clinic’s Administrative Assistant, picked up Charlie and brought her to Portland Help. The first few months were tentative.

“She was clearly detoxing from exposure to the drugs,” Catherine explained. Charlie was unsocial and sought out spaces in the office where she could hide.

“Eventually, Charlie came along just as our patients do,” Catherine said. “She truly is a metaphor for the individuals we serve.”

Today, Charlie is a happy, social animal. The staff at Portland Help Center take turns looking after her. The two attending psychiatrists, Dr. David Lobozzo and Dr. Robert Haines, purchase her food and supplies. She may be found



Charlie the Cat gives and receives love and affection at Portland Help Center.

perched at the receptionist’s desk or curled up on the lap of a patient in the waiting room.

“Charlie belongs here,” Catherine stated. “Our patients think Charlie is their cat. She helps them to feel more comfortable when they come into the clinic.”

Like many of the patients who visit Portland Help Center, Charlie has seen it all and suffered the consequences of a hard life. But through the compassion and support of the mental health professionals at Portland Help, she has been given a warm and caring home where she has the opportunity to receive – and give – love.

“She’s not the most beautiful cat in the world,” Catherine said, “but she is by far the best.” ■

**Portland Help Center is located on Congress Street in Portland. It is an inner-city mental health clinic operated by Spurwink Services. The clinic’s professional and experienced multidisciplinary treatment team provide community based outpatient psychiatric treatment and clinical community support to financially challenged adults with serious and disabling mental illness and chemical dependency.**

## Recent Grants and Initiatives

■ **Spurwink was recently awarded a grant for \$95,305 from SAMHSA - the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.** This federal grant will support projects designed to improve early detection and training for child mental health services. A portion of the grant will support agency-wide training in the highly respected SCERTS model. SCERTS is an educational approach and multidisciplinary framework that prioritizes Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support as the core challenges that must be addressed in any program for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In December, many of Spurwink’s educational, clinical and outpatient professionals will attend a SCERTS in-service training led by Barry Prizant, Ph.D., a researcher, consultant and developer of the SCERTS model.

■ **Target awarded a grant for \$1,500 for Spurwink’s Artist in Residence Program.** This program is in its fourth year at Spurwink and brings accomplished artists into the agency’s seven schools for week-long workshops. Past workshops have included puppet making, dance, mime, pottery, film-making, drumming and photography. The Artist in Residence Program has been successful in engaging Spurwink students in creative expression, raising their levels of confidence and helping them to see the arts as a means of recreation and occupation that they can use in their own lives. This grant is part of ongoing efforts by Target to strengthen families and communities throughout the country.

■ **With a \$13,350 Grant from The Sam L. Cohen Foundation and a second grant of \$2,500 from the Androscoggin County Fund at the Maine Community Foundation, Spurwink Institute’s ALLTech Program will create a partnership with Child Development Services (CDS) in Cumberland and Androscoggin Counties.** Recent studies show that assistive technology is vastly underutilized in young children with disabilities and early childhood experts have strongly recommended that assistive technology services and equipment be made an integral part of early intervention and preschool services for children with disabilities. The outcome of this partnership will be to promote healthy development and enhance learning opportunities for children with severe disabilities. ■

## Spurwink Services

### Spurwink Students Exhibit at the Farnsworth Museum

When art teacher, Tracy Ginn, heard about an upcoming graffiti exhibition at the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland, Maine, she was anxious for her students at Spurwink's Cummings School to take part. Students in secondary public and private schools all over Maine were invited to send art work to be selected by a student jury for the exhibition. The work selected would be matted and framed or could be painted or drawn directly on the gallery walls. Graffiti sculpture was permitted too, however, no spray painting was allowed in the gallery.



Spurwink students, Natasha and Justin, pose for a photo at Julia's Gallery at the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland. They were two of three Spurwink students whose graffiti submissions in colored pencil design were selected for a special exhibit.

Seven students from Tracy's Art Elective class submitted their work and three were selected for the show at Julia's Gallery at the Farnsworth. "We were very excited for Anne, Justin and Natasha whose original and vibrant colored pencil name design sketches were chosen for the show," Tracy proudly stated.

In early August, two Spurwink vans of art students took the long drive to Rockland to visit the Farnsworth Museum and view the show. "It was more than we expected," Tracy reported. "Anne, Justin and Natasha's colored pencil work was placed on one wall together and sparkled in their professional looking frames."

The students were fortunate to spend time touring the extensive permanent collection at the Farnsworth museum and the iconic work of the Wyeth family.

"It was special day in our lives and we felt especially fortunate that our art curriculum fit into this unique opportunity to display our work in a museum setting,"

Tracy said. "Many students proudly proclaimed that they could now address themselves as 'real artists!'" ■

### Save the Date



**Saturday, March 28, 2009**  
**Wyndham Portland Airport Hotel**  
**South Portland, Maine**

Spurwink Services and Pine Tree Society are pleased to present the first annual Southern Maine Autism Conference for families and educators.

This one-day conference will provide practical information and valuable support for families, parents, and other caregivers of children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Participants will have an opportunity to share stories, network, exchange information and gain meaningful insight.

The event welcomes Jason McElwain and his parents to Maine for an inspirational kick-off to the day.

Jason, or J-Mac, is a young man with Autism who was thrown into the spotlight while managing his high school basketball team in 1996. In the final home game of the season for Greece Athena High School in New York, Jason was put in for his first and only appearance on the varsity team. The 5-foot, 6-inch team manager hit six 3-point shots and a 2-pointer, scoring a total of 20 points in four minutes! He was carried off the court on his teammates' shoulders. A video of Jason's performance circulated on YouTube and in no time everyone was talking about his triumph. Jason also co-wrote his memoir, "The Game of My Life."

Following the McElwains' morning presentation, participants will have the opportunity to attend three breakout sessions. In addition, the exhibit hall will be filled with representatives from a wide variety of businesses and organizations.

Admission is free and online registration will open in January 2009. For more information, visit: [www.maineautismconference.org](http://www.maineautismconference.org). ■

## Spurwink Services

### From Pineland to Spurwink: 30 Years Later

Thirty years ago, Pam Goddard resided in Pineland, a state facility for individuals with developmental disabilities. As public hospitals were closed due to deinstitutionalization and patients were moved into community-based mental health services, Pam found herself at Spurwink. The year was 1978 and Pam was 24 years old.

"Pam didn't really have any family, so she grew up in an institution," said Sue Murphy, Spurwink's Director of Adult Services.

Pam moved into one of Spurwink's first residential homes for adults on Woodford Street in Portland. "Pam was extremely difficult," Sue said. "At the time, she was unhappy, had many ups and downs and had no stable, solid relationship with others. She would destroy property, hurt herself and often require intervention from police and medical emergency services."

As time passed, Pam grew more comfortable in her new environment at Spurwink. She slowly developed relationships with her direct care staff. Her behavior improved and so did her outlook on life. With a touch of humor and a mischievous grin, many a familiar staff has heard Pam reflect back on the "old days" with a sense of pride about her growth.

"We became the family that Pam never had," Sue recalled. "She has developed long-term relationships and lived in a home with a Spurwink Therapeutic Couple for many years. Today Pam is happy, active in her community and looks forward to times she can spend with friends and others she has come to know over the years."

Jennifer Litwinowich, Assistant Director of the Adult Program, describes Pam as a social butterfly. "Pam knows everybody," Jen stated. "She loves yard sales and going shopping and she volunteers at a nursing home once a week."

Former and current Spurwink employees are among those whom Pam considers good friends. Individuals like Clarence Smith, Phil Nagem and Robin Gill all spend time with Pam

outside of their regular schedules.

"The ability to maintain these long-term relationships is significant for Pam," Sue said.

This year marks Pam's 30th year at Spurwink. Over the years, she has been challenged with many medical issues. Throughout it all, she has shown strength and endurance that surprised, yet delighted, those who know her. She has experienced life's joys and losses like everyone else. Every weekday morning Pam gets up and heads out with gusto to Spurwink's Community Service Program in Portland. On the week-ends, she relaxes, visits with others and shops, among other activities. Her life is full and she is an active, engaged member of the community.

Pam's formative days at Pineland are a very distant memory. Today she resides in a safe, structured home in a residential neighborhood in Westbrook that she shares with Tom and Marsha Mourhess, a Spurwink Therapeutic Couple, and three other residents. "They are like my family," Pam said. ■



Pam Goddard (center) has resided in a Spurwink home for 30 years. She is joined by Sue Murphy (left), Director of Adult Services and Jennifer Litwinowich, Assistant Director of Adult Services.

## Spurwink Institute

### Positive Behavior Support for Early Care and Education Professionals: A New Curriculum Developed by BHSI



The Behavioral Health Sciences Institute (BHSI) is developing a new curriculum to bring positive behavior support practices to early care and education settings. In the Foundation for Child Development Brief Series No. 3 (May 2005), it was noted that Maine has one of the highest rates of children being asked to leave early care and education facilities because of behavior problems. BHSI believes training early care and education staff to implement positive behavior supports will enable providers to effectively manage a wide range of childhood behaviors and support healthy social and emotional development.



The Positive Behavior Support for Early Care (PBS-EC) curriculum offers a proactive approach to the social-emotional development of children. PBS-EC training for early care and education professionals will improve the quality of care provided for all of Maine's children, by giving early care professionals the tools to create a positive, safe and nurturing environment.

The Positive Behavior Support for Early Care curriculum offers a multi-module training designed to support child care providers and educators in their daily interactions with children and families. The training module topics include:

- Self-Awareness: Developing the Practitioner's Reflective Practice
- Relationships: Building Family Partnerships, Understanding Family Systems, and Practicing Effective Communication
- The Basics of Behavior and Social Emotional Development: Establishing the Meaning, Purpose, and Influences of Behavior
- Age-Appropriate Interventions: Stages of Development and Early Intervention Strategies

- Red Flags: Recognizing Warning Signs and Fostering a Safe and Stable Environment
- Continuing Support and Self-Care: What Professionals Need to Effectively Implement PBS-EC

This training is designed to provide professionals with a basic theoretical foundation as well as multiple opportunities for practice and application. Participants will engage in independent, small group, and large group activities; additionally, participants will role play behavior intervention scenarios. With each module, participants will receive module-specific vocabulary, theory and research, suggested activities for implementation, and a checklist that serves as a comprehensive skills assessment. Each participant will receive a training manual as a resource. The PBS-EC training also offers the opportunity for follow up support for early care providers, teachers and administrators through post training reflection and evaluation.

The PBS-EC curriculum is approved by DHHS – Division of Licensing and Regulatory Services for continuing education credits. Trainings will be offered in the spring of 2009.

For more information, please contact Jennifer Tiner, Early Care Training Specialist at the Spurwink Institute, at 688-4589, extension 121. ■



## Spurwink's Augusta Boys and Girls Club for Teens

### From Humble Beginnings to a Busy Teen Center: A History of the Augusta Boys & Girls Club for Teens

The Augusta Boys and Girls Club for Teens has been an evolving project that now plays a significant role in serving the needs of teens in Augusta.

In 1997, Kathi Wall, a registered nurse and community organizer, was leading a group of high-risk kids at Cony High School called Project Hope. The group had a cable TV-7 program called Teen Talk, a newsletter called HOPE, and a Speaker's Bureau that sent kids to speak with adults about their lives. Ultimately, the teens asked a group of trusted adults, many teachers and counselors at Cony High School to join them in the creation of a place where teens could hang out. At the same time, Governor Angus King introduced a state-wide initiative, Communities for Children, bringing communities together to improve environments for young people of all ages. Organizers in the Augusta area formed Capital Kids/Augusta Communities for Children and joined with Susan Savell of the Governor's Children's Cabinet.



Kathi Wall

After securing non-profit status, Capital Kids opened "The Place for Teens" on Water Street in Augusta in the fall of 1999. The grotto-style space had formerly been home to Guido's, a landmark Italian restaurant.

Kathi Wall recalled: "Students from Maranacook, Gardiner and Cony High Schools and the Capital Area Technical Center gathered to help remove pigeon and rat dwellings, lift up old rugs and clear out enough space to move in. When the official opening took place on New Year's Eve of 2000, the place was called The Edge by virtue of a naming contest at Cony High School."

Federal and state grants helped Capital Kids grow important programs. The United Way provided support and called it "a treasure developing in downtown Augusta," paving the way for funding from The Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs. With the support of the Waterville Boys and Girls Club for Teens and grant funds from the Office of Justice Programs, Capital Kids was able to hire a part-time Program Coordinator. The Edge gradually became a popular concert venue that paired teen bands with up-and-coming professional bands "from away."

"Our move from Water Street to our current home at The Buker Center was a long process," Kathi said. "It began with the aging out of some significant grants, decrease in income, loss of paid personnel, and the city council's sense that a teen center somehow slowed downtown development. We were done with the

infancy stage and started to learn the true meaning of sustainability."

In 2005, Spurwink acquired Capital Kids, offering greatly needed support in both administration and human resources. In 2006, Capital Kids obtained a mental health license which allowed the program to broaden services, add a case management component and increase its sustainable income.

Capital Kids has been fortunate to have the commitment of many community members. Some were involved in the early development of the organization; others provide stewardship today.

The doors of the teen center are open to all teenagers ages 13 – 18. To date, over 1,200 teenagers have become members and use the center in a variety of ways.

"We pay attention to how kids do in school and often act as friends and counselors," Kathi said. "The important thing has always been to keep our doors open for those who need us." ■

**Teen Center Recognized by Local Chamber**

#### Teen Center Recognized by Local Chamber

The Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce has selected the Augusta Boys and Girls Club for Teens and Kathi Wall, Executive Director, as a recipient of the annual Community Service Award. This prestigious award is designed to recognize those businesses and organizations - and the people who provide leadership for them - who contribute to the quality of life and have a profound effect on the business environment and the economy in the Capital Area and beyond.

This award will be presented at the Chamber's Annual Awards Banquet on January 23, 2009 at the Augusta Civic Center.

For more information, contact the Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce at 207-623-4559 or visit [www.augustamaine.com](http://www.augustamaine.com). ■

**Augusta Boys & Girls Club for Teens**  
**a division of spurwink**  
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