Charles River Center
Real Friends Project
Charles River Center Amis
July 2013 – June 2014
Final Report

Staff

Ellen Kilicarslan, Vice President of Family Support and Individual Support
Kate Robery, Program Director of Individual Support
Kelly Atkins, Family Support Program Coordinator
Betsy Hinchey – Family Support Program Coordinator
The Charles River Center is committed to supporting the valuable friendships of the individuals we support which is why we were interested in applying for the Real Friends grant. We began our journey into the Real Friends Project with a focus on the adults that we support. We decided that we would find people in the community and create events for them to meet the people at the Charles River Center and from there we hoped we could encourage friendships to develop. Our idea was that we would create a structure similar to the program Best Buddies but on a local level and with the intention that the relationships be long lasting. We called it Charles River Amis.

Our initial approach was to blast these community groups with information about the new program we were starting at the Charles River Center. We emailed, called and sent mailings to these groups but did not have much success communicating what we were trying to accomplish. We wanted to educate these groups on what we were trying to accomplish as well as to advertise some “Meet and Greets” that we had thought would be fun. We reached out to the following groups: Needham Exchange Club; Wellesley Women’s Group; Charles River Center employees; Volunteers Around Needham (VAN); Needham Farm Group; planned Car Clubs; Dance Clubs; Bowling Leagues; Newton Youth Interagency Task Force; other civic groups; CRC individual parent and siblings; high schools and colleges.

We had thought by hosting Meet and Greets we would allow a casual environment for both sides of the potential friendship the opportunity to mingle, get to know each other while having something in common. This thing in common was how we chose the venue for our Meet and Greet. For example, we thought of a sport theme and held the first “Meet and Greet” at the Bass Pro Shops in Foxboro. While we had quite a bit of fun we did not get any members from the community to join the group of individuals that showed up. After the event we decided we figured we would have to have a more personal approach and our volunteer Linda Goldman – outreached and made herself available to talk to groups including the ones she belonged to. We met with staff throughout the agency to promote this initiative. Since our initial proposal we decided it is easier to have an individual in mind and reach out to community groups with that specific idea in mind. For example if Joe really likes to bowl we are going to reach out to a local men’s bowling league that meets regularly.

We held two other potential meet and greet events, one was at the Natick Outdoor Store and the other was at Kings in Dedham. We had the same approach of mailings, phone calls and emails but we were targeting specific sports groups or clubs. Once again, at these events we had fun but no community members joined us.

We hosted a training from Jim Ross and also had a parent attend the train the trainer event. We continued to promote the program at our agency and the local DDS offices.
Each time we had a staff meeting we brainstormed ideas – they included Meet Ups – an online way to meet people with similar interests, Art Bars, socialbostonsports etc., basically we were going to go where people of similar interests were already meeting. We started with the Meet Ups and tried to get local people who wanted to volunteer in their community and set a date and time and had one individual interested.

Through our continuous outreach, education and brainstorming a new member of our staff at the Charles River Center came across the need for our newest and most successful endeavor.

The idea for a volunteer training program started at the request of a parent. Her daughter often needed a chaperone for after-school activities such as Girl Scouts, and having a parent tag along was not only inconvenient for the family, but also isolating for Jordan. What if older peers could chaperone? What if they be a companion rather than a babysitter, helping her make friends rather than inhibiting? If high school volunteers could be trained in how to be sensitive and responsible when working with, caring for and being around kids with developmental disabilities, then they could fill this gap.

We decided to pair the volunteer training ideas with our Real Friends project after realizing that our direct attempts to create friendships were largely unsuccessful. Perhaps we needed a more indirect approach. Perhaps, under the lure of volunteer hours and valuable training, high school and middle school students would unintentionally befriend one another. With this in mind, we planned a two day training program for high school volunteers, and on the second day – we invited middle and high school aged kids with developmental disabilities to join us. Through get-to-know you activities, games and discussion, we hoped that of the kids could begin to see similarities with one another and make connections that could lead to genuine friendships down the road.

We had solid support from and Framingham High School, Natick High School, Wellesley High School and other area schools as well as SEPACS.

Our first session we had 5 students show up from 4 towns. The training included The Real Friends project, disability awareness, communication, people first language and many other pertinent topics. It was a great success, and all of the students were committed to participating in the second half of the training. The high school students without disabilities received a certificate of completion in training and the kids with disabilities received a certificate of participation. It worked out that the trained high school students could spend time with both children ages 9-13 as possible chaperones, recreation aides, and teens and young adults 14-20 as possible friends.

We created a yearbook with their contact information, people’s comments about the experience and pictures. This was one more way to promote communication and friendship. Our next step with this new program is to invite the group of possible friends to a fun event, such as Canobie Lake Park, Kings Bowling or whatever the group decide to do together.
This effort will be replicated throughout the year and we anticipate we will be creating the momentum for people without disabilities and people with disabilities will find some friendships with one another.

The Charles River Center has benefitted greatly from receiving the grant for the Real Friends Project. This project and grant has set the foundation for us to move in a direction to promote and think of ways and opportunities to have people with and without disabilities meeting one another. We are committed to continue with this project and promote the importance of Real Friends.
Final Report

Primary Goals of the Project

- To introduce the people we support to a network of friends from their community
- To nurture real friendships between people with developmental disabilities and non-disabled partners

Where it Began

Two years ago, my colleagues and I were energized by a presentation of the Worcester Club 21 at an Alternatives event and were eager to begin a club in our region for people we support. After nearly a year of creating a number of resource plans and meeting with key people in our organization, we learned that there was simply no way to get the resources we needed to launch our club. Then we learned about the grant from the Real Friends Project and were ecstatic to find out we were awarded the funds we needed to hire staff and cover the cost of events. At that point what we needed most was a leader, someone who could bring our vision to life! The job was posted for nearly three months and we struggled to find a good match for the position. We knew Kathy Lyons from our many mutual community connections – mainly Girl Scouts and Northbridge Schools Parent Advisory Council. We approached her because we knew she had the community connections and outgoing personality to make it work. She joined us in the fall, in plenty of time to develop a plan to spread the word and build community support for the Club. Kathy attended Worcester Club 21 events, spoke to a number of community and church groups, sent out press releases to local newspapers and talked face-to-face with people she knew might like to meet a new friend. By February, we were ready to hold our kick-off event and it was a huge success. It was well-attended by both people served and individuals from the wider community and the event was even covered by the local press.

So far this year, we have had two whole-club gatherings, one being a picnic at Purgatory Chasm on a warm, spring evening. Each partnership has had at least one “adventure” together – everything from grabbing a cup of coffee together to seeing a local theater production. In the upcoming weeks, partners have been charged with grouping together for “posse adventures” where they form small groups for an outing. This week, a few of our partners are getting together to see one of their own perform in “Godspell, Jr” in the Singh Performing Arts Center at Alternatives’ Whitin Mill.

Now that Club 21 is up and running as an active social group with seven partnerships, we realize that the most important factor in our success was spreading our message through word of mouth. We told everyone we knew to tell someone they knew. We put articles
in the paper, posted to Alternatives’ Facebook page, and had announcements in church bulletins all over town. We developed a flyer and handed it out and emailed to anyone who would take it. This allowed us to build excitement and a sense of anticipation for what Club 21 could offer. We follow a similar format to the original Club 21 structure. It is the brainchild of Nat Needle, a Worcester musician and friend of Alternatives’ Executive Director. Originally, Club 21 paired people with psychiatric disabilities with non-disabled members of their community. Each month, there is a partner adventure and either a posse adventure (which is with another 1, 2 or more partners) or a whole group gathering. This arrangement gives everyone the opportunity to meet twice per month and get to know their own partner better as well as others in the Club, creating a real, live social network.

**Overcoming Challenges**

After we matched partners and planned activities, the inevitable challenges started to surface. Most of the interest in becoming non-disabled partners came from women, so we had to make a decision about how we would approach the matching process. At first, we had been advised by the leaders of the original Club 21 that partners of the same gender were necessary. Not only did it have the best chance of success, but it minimized the incidents where people might misinterpret the intentions of the relationships. With many interested male partners being people served by Alternatives, we are finding it particularly difficult to find men to follow through with becoming community partners. We continue to reach out to male-dominated community organizations and spread the word to spouses and the significant others of employees and other Club 21 Partners. We are also trying to be creative with partner matching, considering partnering males with families or couples instead of 1:1 matchups.

In addition, other challenges include supporting people with developmental disabilities to navigate the often uncharted waters of adult relationships. Getting to know someone new is a very slow, delicate process and bonds are cemented through shared experience. This is often the first genuine friendship outside of a person’s family or network of supports and many have little experience with socializing in the modern age. Many have been very eager to fast-forward through the initial stages of relationship-building and need extra support to help them recognize personal boundaries such as how often one should call a friend, or what personal details to share during the initial stages of friendship. We hope to address these issues during some social skills workshops we have planned this fall. We have recognized very early in the process that people feel most comfortable with the idea of having a flexible partnership – if either of the partners feels the match isn’t working, we will be happy to look for another, more compatible partner for that person.

**What’s In Store**

Going forward, we are committed to continuing our project beyond the end of the term of the Real Friends’ Project grant. Alternatives is looking for creative ways to fund Club 21 by exploring other options such as a fundraising project through its successful
Community Campaign. I am confident that Alternatives is dedicated to the success of Club 21 and will do whatever needed to invest in its future.

For anyone considering developing a similar project, it is important to keep in mind that one needs three important qualities for success: Patience, Perseverance, and Passion. Be prepared to make several phone calls, write many letters, and speak to a number of people before you find even one person willing to make a commitment. It is your passion, your dedication to improving the lives of people with disabilities and your community spirit that will inspire them to commit. You may need to ask the same people several times before they make a decision, but your contagious spirit will make it a worthwhile experience for everyone. If you keep that spirit alive, the people and resources will eventually find their way to you!

Contact Information:

Kathy Lyons, Program Coordinator
katherine.lyons@alternativesnet.org
508-266-6533

Lori Girard, Director of Program Development
lori.girard@alternativesnet.org
508-266-6566
Final Report: Real Friends Mini-Grant Project, June, 2014
“Cultivating Friendships Through Horticulture”

Project: Coastal Connections, Inc. used the mini-grant offered by the ARC of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services to develop a program entitled “Cultivating Friendships Through Horticulture.” The intention of this grant was to implement, expand and refine activities that support relationships and friendships between people with and without disabilities. A very important part of the mission of Coastal Connections is to develop meaningful relationships within the community. The grant used horticulture as a project that brought people in the community together with individuals served by Coastal Connections both inside the agency and at community sites.

Premise: We believe that true friendships develop over time and occur when people are engaged in an activity or hobby of common interest. Coastal Connections used horticulture as the interest area and started the project by developing a network of community people who share that common interest. The belief was that when people spend time together,over a long period of time, natural relationships will develop.

Process: This one year project included:
- Establishing a Horticulture Grant Committee to oversee the project, networking with community, weekly meetings.
- Identifying a core group of ten individuals served by Coastal Connections who have an interest in horticulture – this was done through interest inventories and situational assessments (bringing people into an area with plants, providing support and assessing their engagement and interest in the activity). This was a very diverse group of individuals ranging in age from 23 – 72 years old, verbal and non-verbal, ambulatory and non-ambulatory.
- Once the core group was identified, the Committee began to reach out to the community to find demographics that would match our participants, i.e., the local Council on Aging, local farm and local school. This involved phone calls and visits to introduce ourselves, describe the project and make plans. Personal contact was made with each community participant. This was a key factor in the success of the relationships that were built.
- Network of support was identified: Amesbury High School had a greenhouse located in their school that was underutilized, Salisbury Community Gardens, Whittier Home, Amesbury Council on Aging, Pettengill Farms, bi-weekly trips set up to Amesbury High School, tours completed of farms and gardens, shopping trips with friends.
- Bringing people into Coastal Connections who have an interest in plants and have them work 1:1 with individuals served by our agency as we all learn together about horticulture
- Purchase of portable greenhouses and Aerogardens for winter horticulture projects

Unexpected outcomes/secondary gains:
- The horticulture program grew and grew – more individuals expressed interest in this hobby!
- New friendships developed within Coastal Connections as more people became involved in planting.
- One existing friendship took on a new dimension as they explored horticulture together.
- Other opportunities became available to us as we developed friendships in the community. Amesbury High School invited a small group to a community theater presentation.
- The Council on Aging asked one individual to start attending weekly lunch and bingo at the Council on Aging.
- Coastal Connections held its first annual Art and Horticulture Exhibition. This was a huge community event held at a local transportation center. Senator Kathleen O’Connor –Ives and Mayor Ken Gray attended the ribbon cutting and over 200 community members came to the event.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead
Unexpected outcomes/secondary gains-continued:
- You do not need to be an expert in horticulture to run a horticulture program!!! You need to be committed to the belief that when people work together on anything then good things will happen.

Barriers/Cautions/pitfalls:
- Things take time and staffing. There needs to be a full commitment to the project from all parties and the development of true relationships evolve over time.
- Be willing to change! People change, friends change, and activities change — go with the flow and make sure you are headed towards the true goal of developing friendships.
- Health issues prevented one friendship from evolving after all the groundwork was laid.
- Some things are just too difficult — we had to drop the work on the community garden-inaccessible site, physical work was too difficult.

What worked well:
The personal connections and follow through when building friendships was a critical part of our success; looking within the agency for resources, networks and existing opportunities to grow friendships; establishing relationships with several organizations that match our vision and mission so we all worked on the shared belief that friendships are a vital part of life; skill building and seeing individuals complete tasks they never completed before and develop social skills with friends; individuals developed a better understanding of what constitutes a real friend; social skills curriculum became available and helped individuals begin to understand the components of true friendships.

Sustaining the effort:
- The monies from the grant were used to purchase our start up materials, equipment and supplies to establish a horticulture program.
- We now have the aerogardens, greenhouses and tools needed to carry on a horticulture program. Horticulture has taken on a life of its own at Coastal! We have established a horticulture room and we plan on offering horticulture to anyone who is interested.
- We will continue to carry on the existing relationships with our current friends and look for opportunities for expansion to new friends. We will hold a 2nd Annual Art and Horticulture show next May, 2015.

Recommendations:
Follow your passion and values. Develop the plan with staff input for then you will have staff enthusiasm and drive for the staff to carry on and further the project. Develop a plan that embraces your philosophy. This model of project based friendships can be duplicated in any hobby area. You do not need to be the 'expert' in any field except how to support people to engage to the maximum degree possible in any activity you design.

Contact information:
Deborah Plumer, Executive Director, Coastal Connections, Inc. Email: dplumer@coastalconnections.org

Resources:

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Intentional Friends

Karin Bonesteel and Ross Hooley of The Nemasket Group, Inc.

In July 2013, the Nemasket Group embarked on its Intentional Friends Project by organizing an agency wide information session that highlighted the issue at hand - people having no or few real friends - and our plan to address this within the purview of the grant. Our purpose of presenting at the agency staff meeting was to engage as many people as we could with the intent that we would: generate enthusiasm and learning throughout the organization; share strategies and methods; and by applying the philosophy that “it takes a village...” – would increase the number of connections and introductions for the people we support.

Our approach was to focus on 5 people currently being supported by each of the 4 programs within the organization. We purposefully selected these individuals as they represented a range of ages, abilities, living situations, life experiences and service provision. The planning process occurred in small groups or “circles”; with teaching, sharing, and strategizing taking place in a larger group setting.

Tom Doody of North Quabbin Citizen Advocacy was recruited to work with the organization on the project. Tom led us in person centered planning for the 5 people with the clear focus being to help the person to develop freely given friendships. Tom is a long time SRV trainer and has over 25 years’ experience as a Citizen Advocacy Coordinator asking valued citizens to enter into relationships with people who are marginalized or devalued by society.

In September Tom presented to approximately 40 people on “Fostering the Development of Freely Given Relationships”. The group was comprised of staff, families, other provider agencies, and ‘plants’- people who maybe had no direct connection with the project but were either knowledgeable about the issues of lack of relationships for people, or who were knowledgeable about the area. Tom asked the group to increase their consciousness of relationships – to interrogate the ordinary. What do neighbors, church members, coworkers, student club members DO TOGETHER? How do they MEET? How do they GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER? How do they GROW CLOSER? How do they BECOME FRIENDS? How do FRIENDS BECOME CLOSER FRIENDS – EVEN ENDURING AND INTIMATE FRIENDS?
The following day the 5 “circles” met to start planning by looking at the person, his/her story, patterns and themes in their life, what their relationship needs were, what typical valued citizens of this age do and then where might there be opportunities for relationships to develop for this person. By (1) knowing the person; (2) identifying opportunities in the person’s neighborhood and community and (3) crafting a plan, we hoped to come up with clear action steps to begin to see the prospects for relationships to grow. Tom encouraged the “circles” to look at relationship development through a very “Intentional Lens” — what do we need to cultivate and on what level in order for relationships to develop.

During the past 10 months each “circle” met five times and as a larger group on 2 occasions to strategize, share successes, challenges, connections and ideas and to review lessons learned.

Of these efforts, things which worked well included:

- dedicated time to thinking deeply of possibilities for 1 person.
- having a strong basis or common understanding of the importance of this issue of relationships within one’s life — i.e. training in Social Role Valorization.
- having people outside of those already involved with this person to throw in a curve ball once in a while — to make us think differently or see differently about someone.
- having people in valued social roles will open the door to new opportunities and friends.
- using people’s networks to get to places or to make introductions.
- using people already within the natural fold of society are better to ‘sponsor’ people within circles.

Some cautionary pitfalls we encountered were:

- being too human service top heavy in our planning and not being able to think out of the box.
- not having the right people in the right place at the right time doing the right thing to be able to take advantage of a relationship development opportunity.
- knowing when to switch tracks, when to throw in the towel, and acknowledging that not all opportunities can be actively pursued at the same time.
- friendships don’t happen overnight (or even in 10 months).
- job duties will detract from or take energy away from these ‘extra’ efforts.
- the need to be tenacious, dogged, persistent, vigilant, creative and observant for all possibilities for people.
It is important that we continue this work for the 5 people originally selected and for other people that the organization supports. We hope to sustain our efforts in the following way(s):

- some groups will continue to meet and carry on the process.
- some efforts will naturally continue as they have become a part of the person's life.
- some efforts have become incorporated into the organizational operations to ensure that the focus is maintained (i.e. include in team meetings, supervision, employee evaluations).
- keep it at the forefront of our work by incorporating it into our everyday work culture – talk about it, share it, struggle with it, do it, get better at it, learn from it, and do it again.

Although we don't necessarily feel qualified to make recommendations, we humbly suggest the following:

- recognize, acknowledge and honor that it is the loving and freely given relationships in our lives that make life worth living and will keep us safe.
- even the best intentioned service providers can only do so much when trying to incorporate people into the natural folds of society; you need someone already there to vet in others.
- make this a priority!!!! You will not be rewarded by the bureaucracy, or receive 2 years with distinction, and other things may suffer because of attention to developing relationships, but it is invaluable. And the rewards for people will be immeasurable.

Project contact information:

Karin Bonesteel (Email: KarinBonesteel@NemasketGroup.org)

Ross Hooley (Email: RossHooley@NemasketGroup.org)

Nemasket Group

56 Bridge Street

Fairhaven, MA 02719

Phone: 508 999 4436
Join Up! Join In!
Community Resources for People with Autism
Funded by The Real Friends Project
Final Report - June 18, 2014

Our Model

The Join Up! Join In! project is an ongoing endeavor initiated by staff and board members of Community Resources for People with Autism. The goal of the project is three fold:

1. To reach out to community recreational organizations to enable them to successfully include young people who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder;
2. To recruit families who desire to have their child fully included in a community program;
3. To facilitate the inclusion of children with autism in community activities, which will hopefully lead to the formation of lasting relationships and friendships for the children involved.

We believe that by facilitating participation in community recreational programs such as the arts, scouting, sports and hobbies, children with autism will have the opportunity to spend time with other children from their community with whom they have a shared interest. It is also our belief that ongoing contact with others in natural settings helps set the stage for relationships to develop. One outcome of the project will be the development of friendships between children with autism and children without disabilities. Learning and playing together create many opportunities for children to get to know one another.

"Join Up! Join in!" connects students with autism with community programs, such as a martial arts center, a dance studio or an after school program. Community Resources provides training and support to help program staff understand the learning styles of children with autism and assist them in developing visual supports and other accommodations that will help the child with autism succeed. We provide support to the children as needed by matching them with trained helpers to assist them in all aspects of group participation. These community helpers take on multiple roles. They help each child understand the schedule and the particular activities of the program; they help the child with tasks as needed and also help them when they are anxious or need reminders about personal space, etc. The most important role of the community helper, however, is to serve as a bridge between the child with autism and the other children in the program. They facilitate relationships between the child with autism and other participants and foster connections which may blossom into friendships.
Implementation

Over the course of the past year, Community Resources has worked with a number of children and youth in a variety of programs to reach our goal of having five young people participate in the Join Up! Join In! program. A group of staff from Community Resources have met regularly to think about possible recreational sites, to reach out to families and to make the appropriate connections. Not all of these connections have worked out as we had hoped yet we learned a lot from the experience and we are heartened by the success of our efforts over all.

The first program we made contact with was the Uechi-Ryu Karate Academy in Chicopee. The sensei at this academy has had a lot of experience with people on the autism spectrum and was enthusiastic about working with us to include a child on the spectrum into one of his classes. We reached out to two young men who had expressed interest in taking karate. Matthew did not feel comfortable with the teacher’s style and reported to his Mom that he did not want to continue after attending a class. Tyler did very well at the first two classes he attended. The teacher’s no nonsense approach helped Tyler focus better in class. After a few classes however, Tyler experienced a great deal of stress and refused to get into the car to go to Uechi-Ryu. It was decided that he would take a break and we would keep the karate academy in mind for other students. Matthew has expressed interest in going to a gym to learn how to box and we will be pursuing that option for him in the fall.

The second program that we have been involved with is the Treehouse Community in Easthampton. This is an intentional community consisting of 12 homes and 48 apartments designed for foster families and elders. The Community House at Treehouse houses an after school program. For over eight months, we have been working with the staff at the after school program to help them include students with autism and foster relationships among the children and youth who attend the program. There are three boys with autism who live in the community and attend the after school program. It has been our aim to train the staff, other students and family members about autism and the importance of inclusion. As a result of several trainings that have taken place, the Treehouse Community is prepared to take the next step. Staff have identified matches for the children with autism and will follow up with facilitating these connections this summer.

The third program we have been actively involved in is Enmotion Dance studio in Springfield. Jade is a lovely young lady on the autism spectrum who has wanted to be included in a regular dance class. Her family was familiar with Enmotion and was happy to have our help with having Jade be an active part of the Thursday evening classes, consisting of tap, ballet and hip hop. The Enmotion studio was very interested in our program of supporting children by providing a community helper to accompany the students with autism. We also helped by paying some of Jade’s class fees. We also provided Enmotion with information on autism that helped them better understand students on the spectrum. We hired Rosa as a community helper. She and Jade are a great pair. Rosa is a natural at being a helper without being intrusive. She helped Jade when she was anxious and helped introduce her to other children and help them spend fun time together. Rosa regularly came to class 15 minutes early so Jade and some other girls could spend time playing games waiting for class to start. This offered Jade a great opportunity to get to know other girls in a natural setting. Jade has become close to several of the other students and attended one of their birthday parties this spring.

We also reached out to another girl in Springfield, Amelia, who was interested in taking dance. She enrolled in the Saturday program offered at Enmotion. Rosa has been attending class with Amelia and again has been successful in helping her get to know other girls. There is not a lot of down time on
Saturday mornings so there is less opportunity for the girls to play games but the connections that Amelia is making have the potential to blossom into friendships.

**Lessons Learned**

1. There is lot of trial and error when working with community programs to help them include children with autism. It is important to do your homework and to explore many possibilities before deciding on a particular program.

2. We have learned that it is better to start with the child’s interest and look for an appropriate local program than to target a program and seek out potential students. Matthew’s story taught us that while we thought that karate would be a popular option for our students, it did not appeal to him and he was clear that he wanted to learn how to box at a gym.

3. It is important to make the right match with a community helper. The helper must be able to blend in with other program participants or instructors and not be obvious about providing support to the student with autism. On the other hand, the helper must be willing to step in and help the student when he or she is having a difficult time. The helper must also be able to look for opportunities to move relationships along.

4. We have worked hard to be open with other participants and parents without unnecessarily labeling the students with autism. One challenge we have encountered is how we present ourselves to other people in the group. We want them to know that we are there to help a student who needs extra support but we try not to over emphasize the person’s diagnosis or problems. We strive to approach other parents in natural ways when inviting them to get to know another family.

5. It takes a lot of effort to make what seem like small strides towards real friendships. Much of our time has been spent setting the stage for relationships to take place. At the Treehouse Community, for example, we have spent hours with the folks who live and work there to build a foundation of understanding and to begin discussions around how to help children experience relationships and friendships with one another. These efforts will pay off, we are sure, as children are supported in getting to know one another and appreciate one another’s differences.

It has been a wonderful experience for all of us at Community Resources for People with Autism to be involved in the Real Friends project. We are excited about the possibilities within our Join up! Join In! program and look forward to working with our local communities to create welcoming spaces for children and young adults with autism.
Final Report

The Real Friends Project: Real Pirate Pride – Hull High School

Philosophy
Students with and without disabilities have much to offer in friendships and each student should be recognized for the traits that make them enjoyable individuals to be around.

Real Pirate Pride

Mission
- To facilitate and enhance authentic friendships between students with and without disabilities.
- Expand these friendships to out of school activities such as going to the movies, watching a sports event, or just hanging out.

Approach in Action

What?
Created a new, social co-curricular club at Hull High School (HHS) – Real Pirate Pride (RPP).

Why?
- To provide social opportunities and activities to bring students with and without disabilities together in a comfortable, safe, and fun environment.
- To initiate & establish relationships.

Who?
- Three student leaders – Brittany Gianibas, Kate Pearson, & Stella Willis
- One faculty advisor – Sheila Blair
- One Technology/Facebook page coordinator – Kristen Landers-Thompson

Where?
- On-site at HHS - classroom, gym, hallway, greenhouse, outdoor athletic fields, auditorium, etc.
- Off-site at various venues - restaurants, theatre, the community/beach, etc.

Approach in Action

When?
- On-site activities occurred every Thursday afternoon from 2:15-3:30
- Off-site activities occurred on weekday evenings and weekends

How?
- Plan the activity/event, with input from RPP members
- Communicate event to students & families via email, flyers, & school announcements
- Gather supplies/shop before event
- Coordinate transportation
- Collect required signed forms
**Some Onsite Activities**
- Ice Cream Social
- Cupcake Decorating
- *Despicable Me* Movie
- “Getting to Know You” Games (2)
- Making Gak
- Gingerbread House Decorating
- Gym Day (2)
- Valentine’s Day Crafts
- Friendship Games-Friend File (2)
- Just “Hang Out” after school
- Fun Day Outside
- Scarf Making
- Art Day
- Make a Music Video

**Some Offsite Activities**
- HHS Play - Oklahoma
- Dinner at Papa Gino’s
- Hull vs. Cohasset Basketball Game
- *Godzilla* Movie
- Ice Cream At JJ’s
- Dune Beach Grass Planting
- Prepare & Cook Dinner at student’s house

**Training for Student Leaders**
1) Information session with teacher of students with disabilities and principal – how to communicate and what it means to be a friend.
2) Reading and discussion of current and relevant articles.
3) AANE online training session – “From Play Dates to Hanging Out.”
4) Information session with the mother of a student with Down syndrome.

**Student Presentations**
- To the Hull School Committee
- To the Parents of SEPAC
- Here, today, at the Friendship Symposium

**Successes**
- Allowed students both with and without disabilities to recognize they’re not so different after all
- Met great, new people
- Made new friends
- Encouraged students with disabilities to seek out and join other co-curricular clubs & sports
- Created leadership roles for students with disabilities
- Further integrated students with disabilities into an already accepting student culture
- Had fun

**Cautionary Pitfalls**
- Financial planning
- Out of pocket expense due to financial organization of school system
- Conflict with other co-curricular activities
- Extensive amount of time for planning, organizing, communicating, presenting, training, reporting
- Conflicting expectations
- Goals and expectations must be understood by all parties involved (administration, faculty, students, and families).
- Age group
Next Steps
Establish Real Pirate Pride at the Elementary Level
The students with disabilities at Hull High School are already an integral part of our school community – both in the classroom and outside of it, but these opportunities only begin at the high school level within our school district. Our vision is to create the RPP club at the elementary school and carry it through middle and high school. This, we feel, would best help students with and without disabilities form real, lasting

Thank You!
Jim Ross and The Real Friends Project for helping us create unexpected, long lasting friendships.

It's been a BLAST!!

Student Opinions
- Emily V (12): "It gives me the ability to express myself freely in an accepting environment, and whenever I come I feel jovial."
- Theresa D. (11): "Unique. A lot of schools don't get an opportunity like this to bond with people and make new friends."
- Aaron (11): "It's been a great experience getting to know and become closer to everyone here."
- Riley T. (10): "The strength of the wolf is the pack and the strength of the pack is the wolf."
- Laurel (10): "RPP has given me new people to feel comfortable with, and a new place to feel comfortable in."
- Danielle (12): "RPP showed me that real friends can come from anywhere."