



NEWSLETTER

Community Life and Meaningful Work for People with Disabilities

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Derek Eshelman, Householder, Writes about His Work at High Spirit

For my entire adult life, I have searched for work that I believe in so completely that the lines between my job and my life disappear. If a job didn't feel like it mattered or it didn't align with my values, I inevitably became restless and started looking for the next thing.

When Lesley and I came to High Spirit, we thought it would be a temporary stop on our path to starting a farm together. I took the job assuming I would be a caregiver, which sounded like a nice enough job, but it didn't sound like something that would hold my interest for long and it didn't even cross my mind that this was what I had been looking for my entire life.

It's probably because the word caregiver couldn't have been more off the mark. It suggests I'm doing all the giving and that my job is to help with the most basic of functions. The word doesn't offer the slightest hint of the complexity of the residents who live at High Spirit or allow for the fact that they have hopes and dreams of their own. I quickly discovered I'm not the one doing all the giving. I'm partnering with the young men I live with so that we can all live the richest and fullest lives we can and there's a lot of give and take from all of us on this journey.

During those breathtaking moments, such as when I'm standing next to Rory as he's



Left to Right: Will Cochran, Rory Adams, Lesley Eshelman, Bar Swain, Derek Eshelman

watching his pet pig give birth, it's easy to get swept away in this type of thinking. It took me longer to realize that even the most mundane routines matter deeply to the young men I live with. When I help Bar take a bath, I'm not just helping him wash off the dirt from a day's worth of farm work. Bar loves being warm, relaxed, and comfortable, but he can't get to that place without help. When I work with Will on the recycling, I'm not just trying to keep the porch organized. Will cares deeply about contributing to the community; it makes him happier than anything else. He can do most of the work on his own, but he needs a hand now and then while sorting.

If the young men I live with were better at expressing their thoughts verbally, I'm sure they could tell you the many ways they have helped me. To name just a few ways, I'll always be thankful for Rory's empathy when he senses I am down, for Bar showing me how to live joyfully, and for Will teaching me to stop rushing through life.

Lesley and I get to stand side by side with the residents in our community and work with them as we all follow our dreams and live our fullest lives. I can't think of anything that matters more than that.



Derek working with Rory



Agency Transition: Hello and Goodbye

We are delighted to welcome **Jennifer Leveroni** to High Spirit as Director of the newly formed High Spirit Agency component of our program. In this role, Jennifer will ensure that High Spirit meets the rigorous standards of care required by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, to ensure that our people are safe, healthy, and engaged. Jen comes to High Spirit with over 19 years of experience as a case manager for individuals with developmental disabilities as well as providing support for those who care for them. Welcome Jen! We're so glad to have you.



Jen Leveroni, Agency Director



Austin and Ashley Join High Spirit

We are delighted to welcome **Austin** and **Ashley Smith** to High Spirit as Householders. Austin and Ashley have been working and training at High Spirit since July, and take on leadership of Seekonk House this winter.

Austin and Ashley first came to High Spirit to visit their friends, Householders Aly and Troy. Inspired by that visit, they began thinking about what it would mean for them to make a big life change, to share their lives with people with disabilities. After more return visits and many conversations with other Householders and Board members they formalized their sincere interest by coming to High Spirit for a

three-month internship. Since then Austin and Ashley have taken the leap of leaving jobs and home in Pennsylvania and have begun work as our newest Householders. We are very glad they did!

Training for new Householders is extensive, including learning about the care needed for residents of the household as well as each person's Individual Service Plan, medical, nutritional and behavioral needs and supports. Other trainings include human rights and non-violence trainings, reporting and records management. Austin and Ashley will also visit other communities and households that serve people with disabilities, including Camphill

What's new?

High Spirit now has a direct contractual relationship with the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, rather than through a separate agency as we have done since starting up in 2008. This closer relationship with DDS will help High Spirit plan for and realize its strategic growth. In addition, consolidating some of the administrative functions of the Agency with those of our Farm and Residential Programs will result in an overall administrative cost reduction of almost 50%, allowing more dollars to be spent directly on staffing and improved facilities that benefit our people.

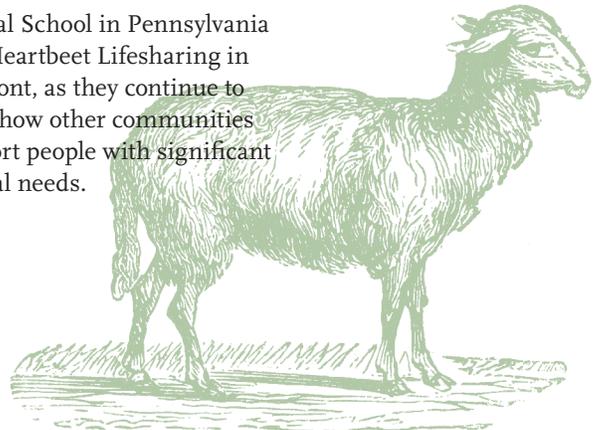
Thank you

Our thanks to **Gail Smallridge** and **Jennie Reins** of the Alliance for Special Needs for guiding us as we started-up and for many years of thoughtful service, and to our retiring Board Members **Robin Dahlberg** and **Jennie Reins** for many years of hard work and wisdom in service of High Spirit.



Austin and Ashley Smith

Special School in Pennsylvania and Heartbeet Lifesharing in Vermont, as they continue to learn how other communities support people with significant special needs.



A Year of Service

Each year young men and women come to High Spirit from around the world to volunteer for a year of service. It's an intense experience, demanding a great deal of energy, enthusiasm and courage—often just as they are learning to communicate in English. At the end of this past year we asked our departing crew of fabulous volunteer coworkers to reflect on their experience. What did you learn being a coworker? What did you enjoy, or not enjoy? What will you take home from your year with High Spirit? The following are some of their responses:

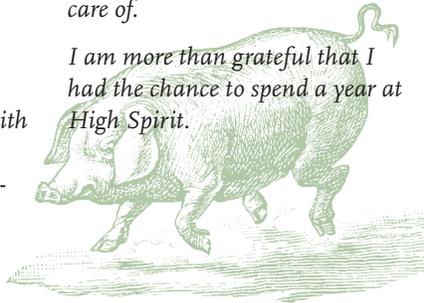
It's an amazing experience. It can be challenging, especially in the beginning. But even though it's hard work, it definitely paid me back in experience and learning.

During this year I think I improved in so many ways—with patience, with social skills and with language skills. I will definitely bring all of those home.

I really enjoyed Saturday afternoons, where all the coworkers and residents went on trips together: blueberry or apple picking, bowling, trips to the beach, to farmers markets, parades in town, and so many other things. Those trips were always a highlight for everyone, since it was something special, and it helped to build close friendships between coworkers and residents.

Before I came here I didn't have any experience with people with special needs. I would have never have thought that I would stop seeing the disabilities and start seeing the person behind so quickly. Over the year I gained truly wonderful friendships with Bar, Rory and Will, and I see them more as my friends than I see them as the people I take care of.

I am more than grateful that I had the chance to spend a year at High Spirit.



Back Row: Merle Lau, Jule Fischer, Nils Turner
Front Row: Jantje Mundt, Daniele Rossi

Getting to know everyone's incredible personalities as well as their personal challenges taught me to not take anything for granted. A lot of patience was required of me, but I learned I could do it, and I learned to appreciate the small victories in life.

My favorite part of the week was the Yoga Class with Rory. He learned a lot over the year, and in the end he could do downward facing dog better than I do.

I had many great experiences here and will take a lot home with me, not just all the great memories, but things that I learned from the residents—like for example being happy and thankful even for the smallest things. Of course there were many challenging moments, but through time you learn how you can manage them. I've learned to be creative when approaching problems and how to not give up when facing challenges. It's so worth it.

High Spirit Community Farm

fulfills an essential need for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities by providing meaningful work, a dignified home and a rich social and cultural life. To that end High Spirit:

- Provides and supports life-sharing homes where our community members live as a family.
- Directs a farm program, offering on the job training in agricultural work and sustainable practices.
- Expects our members to be responsible, participatory, considerate citizens of the High Spirit community and the larger world.

- Trains young volunteers to provide care to disabled peers and inspires them to be leaders as respectful, inclusive and conscientious adults.
- Serves as a catalyst for investment in this model of care, community and service.

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Left to Right: Troy Hanshe, Aly Pendergist, Lucy Staub, Merle Lau, Ingrid Monserud and Daniele Rossi

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Our thanks to all who have supported High Spirit between November 2016 and October 2017.

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