


A Path to a New Life



Who's that guy with the contagious smile? He's my long time friend Brad Nelson. He's the guy who always announces my presence with vibrant enthusiasm every time he sees me, "It's Rhonda King!" Today Brad is a jovial, quick-witted and charming guy. But 30 years ago, the life he is living today was out of reach...an impossibility...nothing more than a dream. That is until he met the dedicated team from CCRI who would show him the path to a new life.

Brad's mother, Lois, told me that by the time Brad was 11, his behavioral outbursts at home and in school had become so serious that she had to seek an out of home residential placement. His mother was (and continues to be) his biggest advocate. While she felt guilty about moving her son across the state, she just couldn't care for him anymore. Over the course of the next sixteen years, Brad's behaviors became more explosive. He bounced from one placement to another with numerous stops in both the Brainerd and Fergus Falls Regional Treatment Centers. His mother recalls at least twelve moves in sixteen years. The longest any placement ever lasted was two years and that ended when he was physically abused by staff that retaliated against him. Even after all this, his mother never let go of her dream of Brad living a full life in the community.

I first met Brad in 1992 when he was living at the Fergus Falls Regional Treatment Center. I had only visited the Regional Treatment Center a few times prior and found the whole experience very intimidating. Regional Treatment Centers were large institutions with lots of people living in locked units with brick walls and minimal furniture. The hallways were dimly lit and seemed miles long until eventually a large metal door would be in front of you. The doors were all locked, and you would have to wait for someone with keys to open and close them. They would clang closed behind you and echo down the long halls. The people who lived there typically left the locked units once a week at the most. Thus, they exhibited many odd behaviors due to boredom. I was a young lady at the time and this place left a lasting impression on me. One I still remember as though it was yesterday.

After meeting Brad, I thought, "He would be our biggest challenge yet." Brad and I were both 27 years old at the time. He had never had a successful placement due to his violent tendencies and I had no previous experience helping someone with the severity of his behaviors. They told us Brad was a jolly fellow when things were going his way, but when they weren't he was considered dangerous. To make matters worse they said he will use his looming 6 foot plus stature to his advantage with staff.



They clearly communicated they had no confidence in either our ability to succeed nor Brads and predicted he would end up back there in no time. I remember thinking, "Boy, no wonder this guy keeps failing. His staff are negative."

In spite of the lack of confidence in our ability, the Regional Treatment Center released Brad and he moved to CCRI in January 1992. We quickly found out that they had painted an accurate picture. After only a short time he badly injured some of our team members and he was responsible for daily property damage. But we were a determined group, and we kept developing new strategies...the first was to hire staff who were male and bigger than him! But more than that we did the opposite of what people might expect. We exposed him to lots of opportunities and freedom he had never had before. This included community integration and lots of social events. We constantly communicated that we believed in Brad's ability to succeed. After a few years, we reached a turning point and his life really started to change. He developed a bond with his team and he didn't want to disappoint us or return to that locked ward. Nor did he want to lose what he had.

In the 16 years Brad and I have known each other, CCRI has earned the reputation of an agency that can serve many different types of needs and Brad has explored possibilities he may never have had a chance to! He travels regularly, coaches Special Olympics, is employed, volunteers, attends church weekly, and has many, many friends and lives in a nice home. His staff is now both male and female – most of them are much smaller in stature than him (as most of the public is)! He is the self proclaimed uncle to all his caregivers children and is considered a friend by many of their family members. He is quite a social butterfly known far and wide throughout the community. Perhaps

most important of all, his mother has found peace and is able to enjoy her life, because she knows Brad is happy and well cared for. She told me she knows he is truly happy because, "He always cuts his visits to her house shorter than planned." Brad's life is his own and we are all so happy to be a part of it. Brad's progress has allowed his mother to enjoy her retirement years. She no longer lives with the fear of that dreaded phone call, when the case manager breaks it to her that yet another placement failed.

A few years ago, it became obvious to me that Brad's past was just that...the past. He was asked to present an award at a state-wide convention to his caregiver Maury Nissen. Maury had been chosen as one of only six winners for a prestigious award given to people who provide exceptional care to individuals with disabilities. As we watched Brad come up on stage, I have to admit I felt a pang or two of anxiety. When he arrived at the microphone and looked at Eric, his Residential Coordinator, and dismissed him saying, "Don't worry, I'll handle this." I thought "Oh, what's going to happen next?" He started to give his speech and my anxiety started to subside...that is until he spotted me in the crowd, stopped in mid sentence and announced my presence as if I were a movie star! But I should have known that in the end Brad would do what he does best – he delivered an emotional speech detailing what Maury and the other CCRI team members have meant to him over the years. Needless to say, he brought a room of 1,500 men and women to tears with his story and received a standing ovation!

Another sign of how well Brad is doing is the friendships he has built. He is surrounded by many friends. I loved hearing the story about his previous Pastor. Although his Pastor moved to Idaho three years ago, he still includes Brad and his house mates on his annual trip to see a MN Vikings football game. He purchases tickets for all of them to sit right on the field.

Brad has an outstanding team at CCRI that supports him. Eric Hilber began working in Brad's home as a Direct Support Professional and has been working with Brad in some capacity ever since. According to Eric, his intentions were that he was just staying for a few months while he looked for a job as a Recreation Therapist. Ten years later, Eric is still at CCRI and is Brad's Residential Coordinator. As such, he remains a huge advocate for Brad and has been an integral part of helping Brad learn to manage his behaviors and develop the life he is now living and enjoying. The other person who has played a key role is Maury Nissen. He has worked with Brad consistently for over seven years. Brad has come to depend on both of them to be there through all his needs. He and his house mates are lucky to have a team that includes many other dedicated Direct Support Professionals as well. Collectively, they are all helping Brad deal with the next stage of life...aging. When Brad could no longer participate in Special Olympics as an athlete he was encouraged to become a coach so he could stay active and continue to socialize with his friends.

Unfortunately, the aging process has handed Brad some challenges to deal with. One of which is his mobility. In Brad's words, "I'm turning into an old geezer." Eric has worked hard to find ways to slow down the degenerative problems that are at the root of Brad's mobility issues. His mother was able to find an alternative therapy that could potentially help. Unfortunately, when Eric explored this further he found out that Medical Assistance wouldn't pay for it and Brad couldn't afford it. Eric didn't give up, because he felt strongly that Brad needed to try this therapy so he could prolong his independence. As I write this story, Brad is just starting this therapy. Thanks to the ongoing generosity of our donors, CCRI was able to pay for the therapy through our fundraising efforts. During our interview, Brad's mother expressed tremendous gratitude for our ability to provide financial support so her son could try this.

No matter what the aging process has in store for him, I am confident that Brad's future remains bright. He has a dedicated group of men and women who will continue to support him no matter what the obstacle.

One of Brad's favorite activities is dancing. He loves to go to weddings and Arc dances where he can kick up his heels. As you can imagine, his heels don't kick as high as they once used to, but he still makes the best of it. He just gets a little more physical support from his staff and knows he will suffer the consequences (aches and pains) for a few days following. None the less, he doesn't let that slow down his enthusiasm for doing the thing he loves - dancing!

According to Brad's mom, "CCRI took Brad under their wing knowing Brad's past and thanks to the dedication of their team members and never giving up on him, Brad remains with CCRI today. He lives with two other guys who he considers his family and I'm happy because Brad is truly happy!" Brad's is a story of personal growth and what a long term commitment to those we serve means to an individual and their family. I'm very proud of the impact CCRI has had on Brad's life.

Story by Rhonda King, Executive Director



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**CCRI**
Creative Care for
Reaching Independence

CCRI's New Billboard - appearing in Moorhead soon.
Pictured with Brad are Shena Holtgrewe and Nicole Atherton.

Walk & Roll-a-thon for Disability Awareness



Saturday, September 20, 2008. This year we have added a little twist to our annual walk-a-thon by adding a little “roll” to the title! To increase disability awareness we will be providing wheelchairs for people to use during the event. Wheelchair use is optional, but it does make a great visual statement for disability awareness. You or a team of 2 to 4 people will be assigned a wheelchair at registration on the day of the event. You will have an opportunity to decorate your wheelchair before the roll-a-thon begins. Decorate the chair in a theme or as a tribute to a person. Be creative and have fun! The route will follow trails along the scenic Red River

The course should take between 45 minutes and one hour to complete. The event winds down around noon, so you can enjoy the rest of your Saturday.

Why a Walk & Roll-a-thon? The event supports the efforts of CCRI to enhance and enrich the lives and learning of people with disabilities. Your support allows CCRI to promote the rights of people with disabilities to: 1) Have the same variety of community choices as everyone else. 2) Participate in social, economic & political life of their community. 3) Reveal their potential.

Fundraising donations have impacted the lives of those we serve in many different ways:

- Provided additional hours of CCRI services to families and individuals who needed it for emergencies free of charge
- Purchased exercise equipment/gym passes for individuals who needed to improve their health
- Provided art therapy supplies and other therapeutic materials for people who are homebound
- Paid for needed medical services and therapies, not covered under Medical Assistance
- Paid fees for adaptive sports leagues and purchased tickets for the CTIC Adult Prom
- Purchased adaptive equipment that increased independence
- Supported over 80 people with disabilities at Camp H.E.R.O., an accessible camp staffed with medical professionals and caregivers that are familiar with the individual needs of each participant
- Paid for day trip expenses, activities, and fees for individuals to participate in the CCRI Community Connection program - increasing socialization and access to a variety of experiences in the community and surrounding areas.
- Supported the CCRI Adaptive Softball League- with over 90 participants with disabilities from the Fargo Moorhead area.

100% of the proceeds will be added to our service enhancement fund to help the people we serve.

It feels great to be able to participate in an event that has such a HUGE impact on a person’s life.

Please come by yourself or get a team organized today! Pledge forms can be picked up at CCRI or we can send you one. To guarantee the correct T-shirt size, please pre-register by e-mailing jhudson@creativecare.org or calling Jody Hudson at 218-331-2024.

Parties interested in volunteering at the event should also contact Jody at the address/ phone listed above.

CCRI's Adaptive Softball League

It's a warm Sunday night, just after the supper hour and although many people around town might be winding down at the end of a summer weekend, there's a buzz beginning at the Centennial Field softball complex.

You see, on Sunday evenings at 6:15, the athletes of CCRI's Red River Adaptive Softball League begin to gather to play their weekly games. As the players stroll into their respective team dugouts, you can hear the excitement begin to build. The players greet each other with enthusiasm and friendship. The shouts of team spirit fill the air.

There are six teams playing on three different fields. In their brightly colored tshirts they seemingly represent all of the colors in the rainbow.

One team huddles in around each other, piling their hands one atop the other and are instructed by the coach, "Go Team! on 3." As the coach counts, "One...Two...Three" there's a loud cheer, "Go Team!" With their last minute planning done, the games begin.

Volunteer coaches usually pitch to the opposing team or an individual may opt to use the tee to hit the ball. As each batter comes to the plate, they are cheered on by the many fans who are in the stands, as well as their team mates. The air is electric. As batted balls skip across the infield or way out into center field, the teams hustle to get the ball and the runner out.



This is an environment of team work...as everyone, irregardless of the team they are on, helps the others to succeed. Players of all



abilities are provided with the adaptive help they may need to play the game.

CCRI's Red River Valley Adaptive Softball league is run entirely by donations and business sponsorships. CCRI has been organizing the league for many many years. We are able to keep the cost down due to donations

that we receive from our generous donors and funds raised during the annual Walk for Disability Awareness.

At the end of the softball season, there is an awards banquet. Team and individual awards are handed out. It's an opportunity to celebrate another successful year with friends and family.

If you would like to volunteer or be a sponsor in 2009, please contact Jody Hudson at 331-2024. A special thank you to the following businesses for sponsoring our teams:

2008 Softball Sponsors

Ada Auto Dealers

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Baer Poultry Farms

Bennett Houglum Agency

Mhd American Legion Auxiliary

Mhd VFW Ladies Auxiliary



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The mission of CCRI is to enhance and enrich the lives and learning of people with disabilities.

The vision of CCRI is to provide an environment where people of all abilities may experience life's possibilities.

CCRI LEADERSHIP TEAM

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CCRI Sr. Leadership

Rhonda King, Executive Director	20 Years
Lynette Weber, Options Director	17 Years
Shannon Bock, Director of Programs	13 Years
Sue Lopez, SLS Director	11 Years
Carolyn Cossette, Medical Services	11 Years
Jody Hudson, Development Director	9 years
Mark McGuigan, Business Manager	7 years
Carmel Froemke, ARMHS Director	5 years
Andrea Ryan, HR Director	2 years

SAVE THE DATE!

Sat. Sept. 20, 2008
 ~ 9:00 a.m.



5K
Walk
& Roll-a-thon
for Disability Awareness