BFAIR BUZZ

2021 Volume 1

Letter from the CEO

Rich Weisenflue

2020, a year unlike all past for BFAIR as well as so many others. Safeguarding the health and safety of the people we support is the foundation from which all of our services stem. We placed an enormous level of importance to be as thorough as possible that our reaction to the pandemic was appropriate to minimize to the greatest degree possible the effect of the virus to our residents, staff and participants in day programs as well as dealing with the surge throughout the winter months. Funds raised through generous donations to our Annual campaign, several grant awards, as well as in-kind contributions were instrumental to ensure our PPE supplies were in adequate supply.

In a tribute to our staff, our day service programs were retooled and delivered virtually with a creative curriculum designed specifically to meet the needs of people served. BFAIR services, such as Family & Individual Support, Clinical, Adult Family Care and Community Living also adapted to ensure personal connections, communication and oversight continued through a variety of creative means.

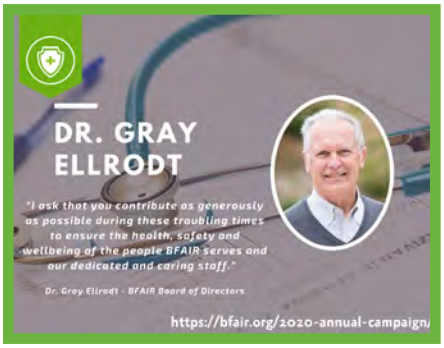
2020 and the first few months of the new year is by far a tribute to the commitment of a dedicated team of our direct support professionals, management and administrative staff working collectively to maintain services and to do so without looking past our focus on quality despite the enormity of the challenge.

Thank you,
Rich

Table of Contents

BFAIR 2020 Annual Campaign	Pg. 2
Community Engagement in the time of COVID	Pg. 3
Online Programming Update	Pg. 4
Thankful Initiatives	Pg. 4
Redemption Center Update	Pg. 5
Staff on the Rise	Pg. 5
Employees of the Quarter	Pg. 6
BFAIR Board Member Announcement	Pg. 6
BFAIR & UCP First Virtual Community Event	Pg. 7
The Caring Force	Pg. 7
Marketing Update	Pg. 7

BFAIR 2020 Annual Campaign: Essential Needs



Our 2020 Annual Campaign focusing on Essential Needs such as Personal Protective Equipment exceeded our campaign goal raising over $28,000.

In this COVID-19 pandemic, protecting the health and safety of the people we support with developmental disabilities, autism, and acquired brain injuries as well as our caring and compassionate staff is a challenge unlike any other we've faced.

Protecting the wellness of the people we serve is the foundation upon which all of our services thrive and while the pandemic we're faced with is a concern for all, people with disabilities may be at an increased risk of transmission especially for those with underlying medical concerns. To minimize the risk of transmission, our residences and day programs implemented extensive preventative measures including the use of PPE, disinfecting protocols, and routine testing of staff.

Maintaining services to the greatest degree possible is essential so in the midst of the surge our safest alternative was creating a virtual curriculum which involved the use of assistive technology for many of those we supported.

Generous donations helped us continue to meet the critical needs of our clients as well as provide our essential staff, in particular our Direct Support Professionals, with personal protective equipment to ensure their health and safety.

Community Engagement in the time of COVID

Giving the Gift of Life!

BFAIR continues to find ways to give back to our community. In November 2020, we held a blood drive with the Berkshire Health Systems Bloodmobile, where our staff donated 14 pints of blood followed in short order by another 15 pints donated in January, 2021. These were both such positive experiences and a safe way for agency staff to do a small part in helping address the critical blood shortage that we plan to hold a drive every 2 months this year.

Operation Warm

This past Fall, BFAIR participated as a member agency of the Northern Berkshire United Way, along with Berkshire Community Action Council for Operation Warm, a coat drive providing warm clothing for children in need. Our North Adams office served as the perfect landing spot for the coat drive using a socially distanced drive-thru pick up for families participating in the program.

photo credit: iBerkshires.com

Festival of Trees

BFAIR participated in the Berkshire Museum's Virtual Festival of Trees this year along with 36 businesses. The Berkshire Museum also had 11 "Lights with Bells" community homes that participated throughout the county decked out in holiday lights. A great socially distanced activity for all to enjoy!

Ugly Sweater Contest

BFAIR's Day Habilitation and Community Based Day Service (CBDS) programs hosted a virtual and in-person Ugly Sweater Contest for program participants and we had a wonderful turnout! Day Hab program member Richard took home the grand prize!

Berkshire Community Action Council Elf Program

BFAIR staff were excited to take part once again in Berkshire Community Action Council's annual Elf Program. This program has been developed to help local families in our community give children a holiday they can cherish. This year we sponsored 30 children donating everything from sleds, stuffed animals, puzzles, dolls, trucks, clothing, and cozy pajamas. BFAIR staff really pitched in and made each child's holiday morning something to remember and this coming year we hope to exceed 30 children and spread even more cheer!

Williams BFAIR Buddies

BFAIR Buddies has been an ongoing relationship between Williams College students, who are involved with the Center for Learning and Action on campus. Although faced with many challenges throughout the pandemic BFAIR Buddies, residents and students were able to continue their connection virtually, thanks to the dedication of Regina Fink and Eva Castagna, both students at Williams. Regina and Eva came together with BFAIR staff to navigate BFAIR Buddies successfully through the pandemic alternating virtual activities between our residences.

Eva states they've had a lot more Williams students join the Zoom calls which has been fantastic, and some have expressed interest in leading activities themselves. Activities organized during Zoom calls have included BINGO, holiday dance parties, painting, name that Disney tune Kahoot, listening to music and group chats to catch up, as well as students playing their musical instruments. Eva also explained a few student volunteers also come up with a movement activity they want to lead in the upcoming months. Overall Zoom has been a great outlet for the people we support to stay connected with the students at Williams College and they always look forward to the upcoming activities and really have a fun time.

Online Programming Update

Through the Fall we have been fortunate that our Day Habilitation and CBDS programs have stayed open with appropriate safety protocols in place. This has been a great way to give individuals a sense of familiarity and has also helped them to keep in touch socially with friends and co-workers. The managers and the staff continue to work together updating the curriculum on a weekly basis.

We currently have members who receive services in person, hybrid or only remote. We provide online services five days a week from 2-3 hours per day. Individuals work on fitness by joining a variety of exercise groups, work on social skills, health and wellness with the program nurses, culinary arts by joining a weekly cooking class, attend a variety of virtual workshops including dancing, drumming, visual arts and yoga, and end their week with a dance party on Fridays.

BFAIR's Employment Services has been taking a deeper look into soft-skills over the past few months with the help of an instructor-led, video-based social and emotional learning and soft-skills curriculum. Program participants learn foundational "soft-skills" for employment such as critical thinking, professionalism, time management, communication, and more. These lessons provide effective video modeling to keep people we support who are typically at work engaged but at a safe distance!

Among a variety of tools, including MECA kits, our Employment Service staff offer their clients strategies for career exploration and planning, vocational skills assessment, training, education and employment. According to Becky McAllister, Employment Services Director, "Using this specialized tool, our clients are provided with work samples and hands-on simulation of tasks associated with a particular skill and with opportunities to try out jobs in a non-threatening and safe environment." There is exposure to entry-level, mid-level, and advanced-level job activities; there's something for all clients receiving BFAIR Employment Services so stay tuned - there's an exciting development right around the corner!

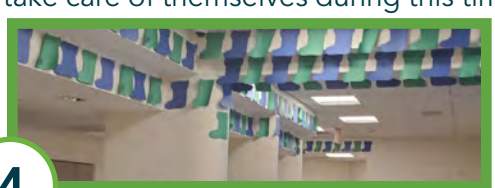
Thankful Initiatives

Looking back over the past many months it's hard to imagine any of us would have thought we would be where we are today. It's almost as if: Where were you when the world stopped turning in March 2020? We were here - at BFAIR. Our world didn't stop turning, it just shifted in countless different directions. While working diligently to address the pressing health and safety issues we witnessed incredible things unfold. Our staff rose to the occasion in ways that were absolutely outstanding. Creative projects to keep our folks engaged took shape, online classroom programming, Facebook live cooking shows, enhanced cleaning protocols not to mention the unwavering support, care and compassion that calmed the concerns of people we support.

We quickly recognized the extraordinary lengths our staff were going to; their flexibility of schedules and adaptability were phenomenal, so we made sure to diligently recognize that. We provided gift bags and baskets to show that we saw them, heard them, supported them and most of all we appreciated their unwavering support for the people they care for. Some of the themes were: movie night, sweet treats, coffee baskets for overnight staff, care packages for families receiving in-home services from our Clinical department and unique individual giftbags for our Community Living and Family & Individual support staff.

Not stopping there because they weren't either, staff received baskets for those working on the holidays, staff appreciation gifts with BFAIR masks, hand sanitizers and we dug deep to offer incentive and hazard pay. We got creative displaying a thankful turkey with messages of appreciation on feathers distributed to staff put on display for those entering our office. Stockings hung with care during the holiday season with each staff person's name proudly showcasing our amazing workforce.

Caring for others is exemplary but self-care is extremely important as well. In response we crafted Wellness events to assist staff managing stress by offering Mindful Moment video sessions, fun challenges to keep staff energized to take care of themselves during this time, flu clinics to afford an extra layer of protections as well as a blood mobile so staff could safely give back to their communities.



As we look back, instead of focusing on all the doom and gloom we chose to focus on all the amazing ways this has brought out the good in people, the countless ways our staff have gone above and beyond for the individuals we support, each other and BFAIR. We truly are one: a BFAIR family.

BFAIR
BOTTLE & CAN REDEMPTION CENTER

Redemption Center Update

"We're doing everything we can to make redeeming cans and bottles easy and safe for our customers!"

Fun Fact:
From June 2020 through December 2020
1,250,800
cans/bottles were redeemed

BFAIR's Bottle and Can Redemption Center which provides employment for people with disabilities has been very busy. As of November 30, we adapted to ensure the safety of our staff and customers by moving to online appointments. Customers may also call to book an appointment. Upon arriving at our Redemption Center, customers are offered the convenience and safety of redeeming their cans and bottles without ever having entered the facility. Our unique service offers two "Curbside" options:

- Driving up, placing your returnables beside your car, Center staff pick-up, sort, count your cans/bottles and your cash-in total is delivered to your vehicle; or even better yet the added convenience of dropping off, leaving and receiving a call from Center staff when your returnables have been counted and your cash-in total is ready.

We're doing everything we can to make life a little bit easier and our amazing customers have embraced our creative service changes. We would like to thank each of you because you sure are keeping us busy!

We are also here to help process your bottle and can fundraiser drive and we accept donations as well to support our Mission. If you have any cans and bottles sitting around the house and would like to drop them off - one less thing to worry about when beginning your Spring cleaning! Give us a call at 413-663-5056 if you would like to learn more about our specialized operation, have questions or are interested in making a donation.

Current hours of operation are: Monday-Saturday 9 AM - 2 PM

Staff on the Rise

We're happy to announce the promotions of two staff members into much-deserved roles in their respective departments; Julia Phykitt, and Christine Mieklejohn.

Julia Phykitt - Director of Clinical Services

Julia attended the Massachusetts College of Liberal arts where she obtained her Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a minor in Behavior Analysis. She furthered her educational career by attending Westfield State University where she completed a Master's program in Applied Behavior Analysis. Since that time, Julia has obtained both board certification and state licensure as a Behavior Analyst. She started her career in human services as a Teaching Assistant with students with Autism. Julia began her career at BFAIR as a part-time Behavior Specialist. She was promoted to Assistant Director Clinical services and recently to Director of Clinical Services given her continued outstanding work.

According to Eric Denette, VP of Clinical Services, "Julia is an integral part of BFAIR's Clinical team. The passion she has for her work positively impacts all aspects of the agency."

Christine Mieklejohn - Director of ABI Residential Services

Christine began her career at BFAIR in 2016 as a Manager of our first residence for adults with acquired brain injury (ABI) and was promoted to ABI Residential Program Supervisor in November 2017. In addition to her primary responsibilities Christine is very active serving on multiple committees and roles including: Incident Review, Medication Administration Program, Fire Safety Officer, strategic planning as well as our Diversity Committee. As one can see Christine embraces our Mission and continually advocates for the individuals and staff she oversees. Michelle Carleton, VP of Residential Services states, "Christine is a wonderful fit for this position and has hit the ground running."

Employees of the Quarter

Congratulations to our Employees of the Quarter Amanda Bona, Kelly Kemp, Madison Benlien, and Philip Liam. This acknowledgement recognizes BFAIR employees who go above and beyond their normal work responsibilities representing the BFAIR way.

BFAIR Board Member Announcements

We are excited to welcome three distinct members of the Berkshire community to our Board of Directors: Dr. Gray Ellrodt, Attorney Steve Narey, and Laila Boucher.

Dr. Gray Ellrodt

Dr. Gray Ellrodt, former Chief of Medicine at Berkshire Medical Center comes to BFAIR with over 30 years plus of experience in the medical field. Gray is a volunteer with the American Heart Association (AHA). He is past president of the AHA Berkshire Board receiving the Chairman's award in 2009, past-President of the Northeast Affiliate Board of Directors, past Chair of the Get with the Guidelines (GWTGs) steering committee and past Chair of the Mission: Lifeline AWG.

Dr. Ellrodt joined our Board of Directors in 2020, and shortly after he graciously volunteered to co-chair our Annual Campaign fundraiser. With BFAIR's focus on service quality and performance measurement, Gray's work as Chief Quality Officer at Berkshire Medical Center will prove invaluable contributing to the efforts of our Quality Compliance department.

Steve Narey

Attorney Steve Narey of Donovan, O'Connor & Dodig LLP, joined BFAIR's Board of Directors in 2021, and has much experience in the human service field including serving on the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress (MDSC) Board which he became involved with following the birth of his youngest son Cole. Serving as President from 2014 - 2018 Attorney Narey received the MDSC's 2020 Leadership Award which recognizes an individual who advocates for disability causes and champions expanded opportunities for individuals with Down's Syndrome.

Serving on BFAIR Governance and Advocacy Committees, we look forward to Steve lending his expertise both as a practicing attorney and a strong advocate for individuals with disabilities.

Laila Boucher

Laila Boucher joined our Board of Directors in 2021 serving on the Finance and Development committees.

Laila is a Mississippi transplant who moved to Berkshire County in 2007. Her husband is a North Adams native and introduced her to the area she now calls home. In 2008 she started her banking career as a Teller for Adams Community Bank and currently is their Vice President of Government Banking.

In Laila's free time she enjoys spending time with her family, cooking and exploring the beautiful scenic trails Berkshire County has to offer. Laila lives in Williamstown with her husband, son, daughter and adorable rescue dog, Max.

BFAIR & UCP of Western MA Team Up to Offer First Virtual Community Event

In a collaborative effort BFAIR & UCP of Western Massachusetts shifted from a scheduled live training in conjunction with Autism Awareness Month to hosting a virtual community event: Listen To My Actions: Insurance Based ABA services and Assistive Technology Overview. Eric Denette, VP of Clinical Services at BFAIR and Elano Dallmeyer, UCP Program Manager shared wonderful presentations with the event attendees.

A broad cross-section of attendees included parents, school administrators, agency directors, board members and more. All who registered, attended both 1-hour sessions; wonderful support for both presenters.

The Caring Force: Essential Human Service Workers Campaign

The Provider's Council, is an association of community-based human service agencies in Massachusetts (www.providers.org).
The Provider's advocacy initiative, The Caring Force is spearheading an Essential Human Service Workers Campaign which we fully support along with other activities designed around the specific goals of raising human service worker compensation, recognizing the skills and commitment of our staff and thanking them for their tireless work. More information will follow as well as opportunities to participate in and through actions, support the Essential Workers campaign.

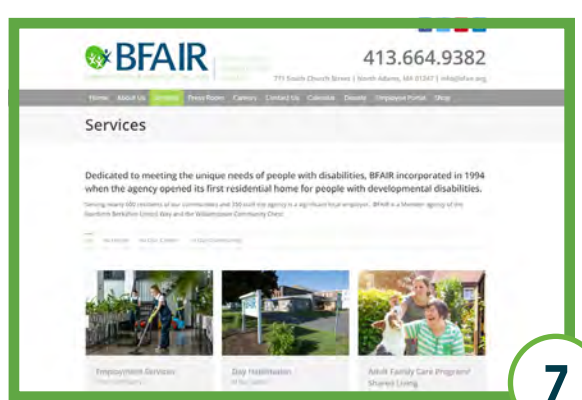
DID YOU KNOW? *"In Massachusetts, workers in more than 180,000 human services jobs kept providing critical services throughout the pandemic, and cared for the most vulnerable of the Commonwealth's residents, 24/7, no matter what. Human service workers care for adults with substance use, mental health and developmental disabilities; they serve adolescents, veterans and domestic violence victims who need additional supports. They work in group home settings, outpatient clinics, food pantries, shelters and drop-in centers and even go into the homes of individuals and families who need extra support navigating life's challenges. They help people to remain in the least restrictive, most independent settings possible, and they have long been undercompensated, in part because the general public is not aware of how essential these services are. They are disproportionately women and people of color.*

We are launching a two-stage campaign to bring public awareness to this workforce, and to advance legislation that will improve compensation and benefits to these selfless and dedicated individuals. Improved compensation will result in reduced turnover, more experienced staff on the frontlines of our industry, and eliminate the need for so many of our workers to have two full time jobs just to make ends meet. One job should be enough, especially when it is so important; there are lives in the balance." (www.caringforce.org)

Marketing Update

BFAIR's Marketing Department has been hard at work over the last year to give the agency's programs and services a cohesive look and feel. This was accomplished by creating new marketing materials for keystone programs and publishing matching service pages on the BFAIR website.

Interested? Visit our new services page here:
www.bfair.org/services



BFAIR

Berkshire Family & Individual Resources

771 South Church Street | North Adams, MA 01247

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers:

- Alex Kastrinakis, *Chairperson*
- Peter Mirante, *Vice Chair*
- Patti Messina, *Clerk*
- Dana Mullen, *Treasurer*

Directors:

- Kim Baker
- Laila Boucher
- Dr. Gray Ellrodt
- Alex Figueroa
- Martha Montgomery
- Steve Narey, Esq.
- Carter White

Proud Member Agency of:

United Way Northern Berkshire United Way

Williamstown Community Chest

KEEP UP WITH US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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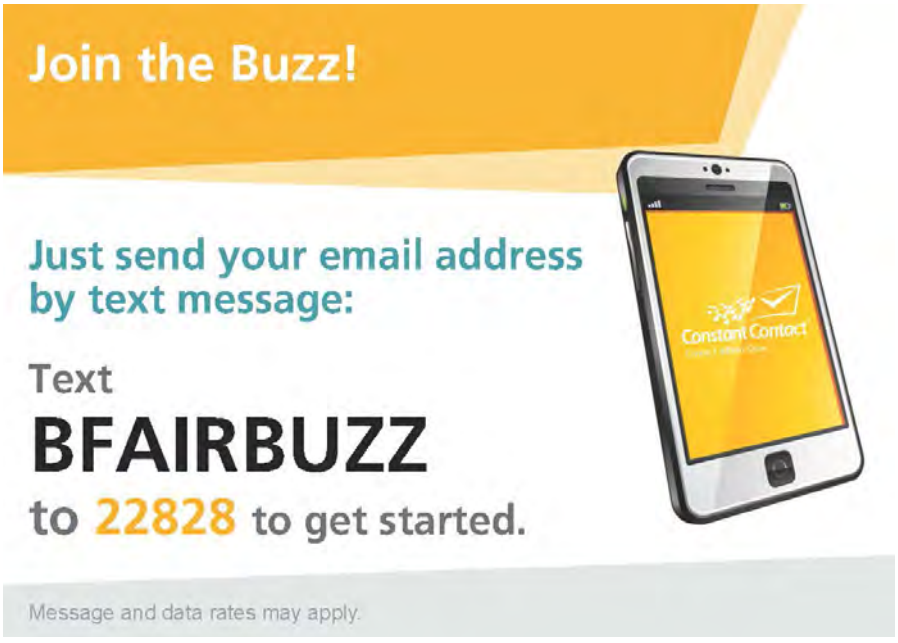

SAVE THE DATE:

BFAIR's 2020 Annual Meeting

Friday, April 30th at 9 AM

Join us on our website or Facebook page to watch!