

EMPOWERING THE LIVES OF ADULTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS - WELLSRING COMMUNITY

Judson Mitchell, Rotary Club of Castle Rock - Published in Rotary District 5450 Newsletter, March 2018

Unless you know someone with developmental disabilities, you might not be aware of the challenge parents face when planning the future for their child with special needs. As one parent poignantly put it, "I just have to live one day longer than my daughter." With few exceptions, individuals with Downs Syndrome, Autism and other developmental disabilities will not go on to college. They won't have careers or move into their own apartments. Many will struggle to find work. Most will never drive a car. For the rest of their lives they will need support and supervision. Some require 24-hour medical care.

Wellspring calls these individuals STARS, an acronym for "Specially Talented Adults Raising Standards".



Yet, like most everyone else, STARS want - and deserve - a place to belong, a place where they can feel accepted and valued. They need a place where they can experience the satisfaction of meaningful work and activity. Their families want a place where they know their loved ones will be safe and receive the best care.

The SWhile the state of Colorado has recently made great strides in addressing the long waiting list for services to individuals with special needs once they are age 21. However, the unfilled demand is still great as hundreds of young men and women with special needs age-out of the public-school system each year. The waiting list for services is still thousands deep, leaving many adults with special needs sitting at home bored and lonely. Their parents are fraught with anxiety trying to find productive activities for their adult child. It's a struggle to find enough time to provide meaningful activities. Most of all, parents wonder who will care for their child when they can no longer provide care.

Wellspring Community in Castle Rock was founded in January 2008 by Mary Lou and Bob Fenton out of a desire to give their own daughter with developmental disabilities an abundant life. The Wellspring mission is to create a work, education and enrichment community where adults with special needs can live full, productive and satisfying lives in a nurturing environment. This is achieved with a wide variety of education and enrichment classes, activities and social events.

Wellspring offers classes such as dance, art, sign language, social skills, technology, zoology and more - five days a week. Work place experiences are provided in the Best Buddies Bakery and Café and the Artbeat Studio. Activities include gardening, dancing, singing in the choir, swimming and CrossFit.

A big favorite of Wellspring STARS is Club 21, a social and recreation club that provides a fun filled evening twice a month on a week-end evening. Club 21 evenings include skits, game nights, hobby nights, karaoke and much more.

The Wellspring website describes all these activities at <https://www.wearewellspring.org>. (Continued on opposite page)





The lives of Wellspring STARS are transformed. Parents are deeply moved and thankful to witness the wonderful changes in their children. Shy and non-communicating individuals, with little or no confidence, become talkative and outgoing with personalities filled with happiness and love. There is something very special about what happens to STARS at Wellspring. It's like the magic of a non-descript chrysalis becoming one of nature's most beautiful works of art, a butterfly.

One mom says, "We have been blessed many times since our move to Colorado. But our biggest blessing has been joining Wellspring Community. Beth is so very happy at Wellspring, looking forward to every day." Another parent says, "It is difficult to put into words the value of the Wellspring Community program to our family. Our daughter is able to have an interesting, productive, fulfilling week instead of staying home day after day." And then a Dad describing his daughter, "Her pride in sharing the things she learns each day is obvious. And her desire and confidence in

attempting some of these same things at home has been fun to watch!"

The knowledge of Wellspring's huge success with adults with special needs has spread across the metro area. Wellspring STARS come from five counties: Douglas, Denver, Arapahoe, Elbert and El Paso. Enrollment has grown from 60 in July 2016 to 72 today, a 20% increase in 18 months.

The Rotary Club of Castle Rock, has sponsored two District Grants for Wellspring in the last two years. The first supported the purchase, assembly and installation of outdoor furniture; this enabled expansion of Best Buddies Café into an adjacent patio. The Café is located at the Emporium in Castle Rock. Another grant funded the purchase of a commercial dough mixer for the Best Buddies Bakery. This enabled increased production and opportunities for more STARS to have a work place experience in the Bakery.

Rotary Club of Castle Rock will sponsor another District Grant this spring to purchase a bus for Wellspring transportation. Wellspring provides transport services to and from neighborhoods of the STARS. This is immensely helpful because it saves many hours of driving by parents. Current transport capacity does not allow Wellspring to fulfill all the requests for home transport service. Thus, the need for an additional bus. Rotary Clubs in the five-county area where STARS live will be invited to participate in this new grant.

The ultimate vision of Wellspring is to establish a Residential Program that will house and care for STARS. This is a big undertaking for Wellspring which will soon include a major effort dedicated to obtaining funds for construction of two group homes, each supporting eight STARS.

Every volunteer who spends a few hours working with STARS comes away with a feeling of happiness and a belief they have experienced something very special. It took this writer a few visits to understand exactly why this was happening. It finally became clear. It was seeing first-hand the joy of innocent and unqualified love the STARS have for their teachers, volunteers and each other. That same happiness, love and joy fills the heart of everyone when they work with the STARS. A visit to Wellspring Community never, ever fails to have that effect.

