

Finding independence with developmental disabilities

By Jessica Bruha | Posted: Monday, September 21, 2015 9:06 am

For years, Jessica, an individual with developmental disabilities, lived with her father and rode the bus to participate in the vocational program Able Bodies Learning to Exel (ABLE) in Norman offers.

Jessica's mother had died, and while her father did the best he could to support her, he was at a lower level of functioning, as well. He did know that he wanted to make sure Jessica would be taken care of if anything happened to him, though.

"He approached the vocational director and he said, 'If you ever have an opening at one of your homes please think of Jessica, because if I die I don't know what will happen to her and I want to take care of her,'" said Jane Ciorba, CEO of ABLE.

When ABLE finally had an opening at one of their group homes, Jessica moved in.

"It was a nice, easy transition because she already knew most of the people in the home because they worked in the workshop. She just loved it. She blossomed," Ciorba said.

Then, Ciorba had a conversation with Jessica's dad and she was reminded of how a parent feels when a child leaves the home.

"If you think of it, it's like your child going off to college. They're independent. They're not living at home and it was harder on dad than it was on her," she said. "He kept saying, 'I want you to know I love Jessica. I'm not kicking her out.'"

Ciorba said she reassured Jessica's father, but will remember how a parent goes through that guilt. Jessica's father felt bad on the one hand, but also wanted to make sure she would be taken care of.



ABLE

Two ABLE residents, Jack and Terri, outside their home Friday during the United Way Day of Caring during which Oklahoma Electric Cooperative helped replace a fence on the property.

Within a month, there was a noticeable difference in Jessica. Ciorba said she started taking her medicine correctly, started losing weight by making healthier food choices, exercising and she made great friends.

“She just blossomed, became more independent,” she said.

Jessica’s story is just one of Ciorba’s favorite stories to tell. It is ABLE’s goal to help people like Jessica become as independent as possible.

“The mission of ABLE is to support, care for, and enable adults with developmental disabilities to meet the challenges of living and working in the community with dignity and independence,” Ciorba said.

ABLE was developed 32 years ago by a group of parents who had some adult children with disabilities. Those parents started a workshop to help the children develop job skills.

A few years later, the parents began looking for a place for their children to live so the adult child could be more independent. So, they opened their first group home.

Today, the nonprofit has four group homes with six residents each. Staff members work from 4 p.m. to midnight to make sure everyone is safe and sleeping through the night, help with cooking and cleaning and take residents shopping or other places they need to go. During the day, clients go to work, participate in ABLE’s vocational program or stay busy with community service.

ABLE also has three daily living support homes with three or four residents each for clients who may have more needs.

As the agency faces cuts in state funding, Ciorba said it’s organizations like United Way that are a “godsend”.

“It’s just a constant struggle,” she said. “We’re so thankful for United Way. They have really helped pull us up.”

For more information about ABLE call 329-3922 or visit ableinnorman.org/index.html.