

# Among Friends offers environment for adults with disabilities, special needs

By Joy Hampton Senior Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, September 23, 2015 9:21 pm

Mark McBride loves to listen to radio, specifically Magic 104. But radio has its limits. Mark has cerebral palsy and dandywalker syndrome, which limit what he can do without assistance. After McBride graduated from high school, his options were limited.

Fortunately for McBride and his family, he found Among Friends an activity center for adults with special needs and disabilities.

“My teacher found this place, so I came here part time before I got my diploma,” he said.

Now he attends full time.

“A big reason I can be proud of Mark is because of Among Friends and that he can be allowed to grow,” said mother, Kelly Powers. “He has risen to the occasion and he has a purpose and a place.”

As McBride made his way through the school system, he had an individual education plan. Powers thought the Department of Rehabilitative Service program would have a place and a purpose for him after he graduated. After three years as a senior, McBride prepared to graduate and there was nowhere to go.

“They exhausted everything that they could through DRS and he was not able to do what they required of him, despite that they do help a lot of people with disabilities,” Powers said. “He was still found to be ineligible. I was naive. I thought, ‘What was the next step,’ but there was no next step.”

When McBride’s teacher told them about Cathe Fox and Among Friends, the organization Fox founded after she discovered there was no place for her daughter with disabilities to meet and spend time with friends.

“It’s just a bunch of happy people living life and building relationships with each other and a sense of community,” Powers said. “They’re all there together for a common good.”

Powers teaches kindergarten through fifth grade with emotional and behavioral disorders. Among



Among Friends offers environment for adults with disabilities, special needs

From left, Dee, Tracy, Brent, Patty, Mark, Jennifer, Tommy and Brandon play Monopoly at Among Friends.

Friends allowed her to continue to work.

“I would have had to quit my job and stay home and we both would have been miserable,” Powers said. “When people think about the United Way, organizations like Among Friends that receive the money, it’s important for them to think about how far-reaching it is.”

She said there truly is a huge ripple affect from those gifts that allow her to continue giving to her very challenging but rewarding students.

“If it weren’t for my passion to keep them where they are, they would be in alternative school,” she said of her students.

But the best thing is the atmosphere at the activity center and the friends McBride has made.

“I just hang out,” he said. “At this time, I like the art.”

McBride said without Among Friends, he might be sitting at home watching TV.

“My parents work,” he said. “It’s a good place to hang out. It’s better than any other community place.”

That could be, in part, due to the devoted staff. For Fox — whose daughter, Jennifer, also attends activities — it’s more than just a job.

“My favorite time with this job is when I can go in there and play a game with them,” Fox said.

Staff member Chris Bojarski said he also feels he’s made friends at work.

“I love it here,” he said. “Every day is a new experience. I feel like I’ve taught them a little, but they’ve taught me so much more.”

Joy Hampton

366-3544

[jhampton@normantranscript.com](mailto:jhampton@normantranscript.com)

Follow me [@joyinvestigates](#)