

## Partnerships help Bridgewell connect people with possibilities.

By Robert Stearns, President and CEO

Becky is a vivacious, developmentally disabled young woman who had bounced around the state's special education system for years. A year ago, when she turned 22, Becky moved into her new home – a staff-supported residence in Salem. When she arrived, she was often angry and agitated, even to the point of running away. Now, working with Bridgewell staff, she has become more relaxed and trusting, has taken control to make decisions for herself, is attending a day program and is enjoying her passion for music. "I love it here," says Becky. "For the first time, I actually feel like I have a family."

Maryanne is another such encouraging story. Also developmentally disabled, she, too, has made great strides since arriving at her new home. At 26 years old, Maryanne has grown to make responsible decisions affecting her day-to-day life. She has opened herself to new friendships and experiences and is enjoying an improved quality of life.

Bridgewell is a private, non-profit human services organization that has been providing support to individuals with developmental and psychiatric disabilities for over 50 years. It originated in 1958 as a child guidance center in downtown Lynn, MA, helping children and families struggling with emotional difficulties. With the de-institutionalization movement in the 1970's, Greater Lynn Mental Health began opening residential programs and changed its name to Greater Lynn Mental Health and Retardation Association. In 2005, Greater Lynn Mental Health and Retardation Association changed its name to Bridgewell, recognizing the diverse population and geographic area that Bridgewell serves.

As a premier service provider for adults (ages 18 and older) with developmental and psychiatric disabilities, physical disabilities and the homeless, Bridgewell serves nearly 3000 people in 85 locations in 18 communities in eastern Massachusetts. Its continuum of care includes: residential services; day habilitation; day treatment; employment training and support; psychotherapy and

psychopharmacology; residential, vocational and transitional homeless services; recreational and educational programs; and affordable housing.

Becky and Maryanne's home is one of seven residences built by Bridgewell in partnership with Caruso & McGovern, a local contractor, during the past three years. There are two residences in Salem and one each in Beverly, Peabody, Wakefield, Saugus and Dracut. Partnerships, with businesses and others, are keys to Bridgewell's success in fulfilling its mission to connect people with possibilities.

These comfortable, fully accessible homes are a testament to the importance of getting individuals out of nursing homes and other institutional settings and into community living. Our life care system is unique. Individuals come at all ages, many at 22, many older. They come to us looking for a quality of life and safe place to call home. We are able to adapt to their needs as their needs change and they feel good about saying, "This is where I live. This is where I want to be."

The Arc of Massachusetts, also dedicated to enhancing the lives of developmentally disabled individuals, is another Bridgewell partner, keeping Bridgewell informed of national trends and opportunities, endlessly advocating for funding and services, continuously educating individuals and families and being the bulwark of the effort to develop community-based living and services for this special population. Other professional partners include the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers, a group representing organizations from across Massachusetts that provide services for people with developmental disabilities and traumatic brain injuries.

Bridgewell also partners with academia. UMass Lowell's engineering program designs assistive technology to



## Bridgewell

help the developmentally disabled meet individual goals. Participants in the Boston Street Center day habilitation program in Lynn now have a fitness machine designed to motivate those with limited motor skills and short attention spans as a result of this important partnership.

Other projects include a digital photo album to help non-verbal people communicate and a touch-mouse pad affording people with cerebral palsy computer access. Students have also designed various calming devices for a sensory room. The University covers the cost of these projects.

Bridgewell counts the Commonwealth of Massachusetts among its partners, working with the state Department of Developmental Services to remain at the forefront of providing services for people with developmental disabilities.

Governor Deval Patrick visited Bridgewell's Boston Street Center last spring. He met individuals supported by Bridgewell staff and witnessed how Bridgewell is maximizing its resources in these difficult financial times. "I see the value of what you do and the contribution you make," he said, noting "It's going to take all of us relying on each other."

Of all the partnerships Bridgewell enjoys, the relationship with individuals supported and their families matters most. Bridgewell either supplements the care provided by family or serves as primary caregiver. The goal is providing the highest level of care possible, connecting people with possibilities, and helping each to fulfill his or her greatest potential.