

BECKWITH News

A Newsletter of Beckwith Residential Support Services



Fall 2015

Nugent Hall | University Housing
College of Applied Health Sciences

A Leap of Faith

by Susann Sears, M.Ed., Director



According to Merriam-Webster, a community is “an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location.” Similarly, a community can be symbolized as a kaleidoscope; where each member represents a slightly different set of shapes, colors, and textures, continually sharing their unique attributes as they move around and interact with each other. When I began my tenure in June as acting director of Beckwith Residential Support Services (BRSS), I knew this was a great opportunity, yet a challenging one as it moved me away from a place of familiarity that I had for 13 years with the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES).

However, Jim Rohn’s quote, “Your life doesn’t get better by chance; it gets better by change,” reminded me of the leap of faith that I took along with so many others in our community. Although intimidating and uncomfortable, change is the catalyst for the “movement” that is responsible for creating the many differing and diverse experiences within our community. I am truly grateful for this opportunity with BRSS and I am excited to share some of the amazing contributions that emerged from our ever-changing kaleidoscope of this past year!

- We welcomed six residents, and many successfully sought out change! Kelly Hussey and her mom, Christine, recognize and celebrated her shifting while joining a few registered student organizations. Sarah McCabe became a blogger for Admissions, and reflected upon her first year; Aly May ran the jumbotron at women’s basketball games as part of her Illini Productions internship; and Nathan Cantu worked with the Illinois Football team inputting information about incoming recruits.
- Luis Jovel, Jr. and his family were profiled in the *Washington Post* regarding his journey to Illinois and BRSS.
- Emily Schuette completed her Interdisciplinary Health Sciences (i-Health) internship primarily supporting Nathan Cantu, our first Parkland Pathway (PP) student. PP allows graduates of Illinois high schools to be dually enrolled at Parkland College and Illinois to obtain eventual admission to specified U of I degree programs.
- Six BRSS residents and a PA received scholarships/awards at the annual DRES/DSO Student Awards Program: Kelly Atkinson, Meridith Bradford, Daniel Escalona, Luis Jovel, Jr., David Kirby, Mark McCarthy, and Alexis Wernsing.
- We were fortunate that Rachel Graddy completed her doctoral OT Internship in the fall, continuing in the spring working part time with BRSS residents. Both Rachel and the residents benefited by her presence.
- Kathleen Downes was one of 15 graduates featured from the Class of 2015 via University of Illinois social media. She also nominated her dad, Chris, for the distinction of King Dad 2014 and won!

These are glimpses of how our community has transformed. Often with amazing outcomes, like residents seeing themselves as artists and enjoying art classes taught by Sheila Schneider (M.A., Industrial Design ’14 and DRES alum). In closing, we wish Jordan Bopes, Kathleen Downes, Ani Hunt, and Kelsey Rozema all the best. Ani will be pursuing an internship to complete her graduate studies. Jordan, Kathleen, and Kelsey all graduated with their Bachelor’s degrees. Fortunately, Jordan is returning in the fall pursuing a Master of Social Work degree. Kathleen and Kelsey will certainly be missed as they pursue their graduate studies at other institutions. BRSS will always be here for you. This is not goodbye, but another shift in the spectrum, which is something that BRSS alum Corey Hyslop (BS ’10; MHRIR ’12) understands through his own life experiences.



A Beautiful Community

by Patricia B. Malik, Ph.D., Interim Director of DRES

The authors of this year's *Beckwith News* were asked to reflect upon and explore the similarities between a kaleidoscope and community, more specifically the Beckwith community. In keeping with this theme the following quote from Henry Ward Beecher seems most appropriate. "Our days are a kaleidoscope. Every instant a change takes place in the contents. New harmonies, new contrasts, new combinations of every sort. Nothing ever happens twice alike. The most familiar people stand each moment in some new relation to each other, to their work to surrounding object." While this newsletter is a reflection of the past year it is important to note that this 33rd year of Beckwith Residential Support Services (BRSS) is built upon previous colorful people and combinations of shared experiences that make this one of the most unique and, dare I say, one of the most beautiful communities to belong. This community continues to be vibrant as it challenges each person (resident and staff alike) to be the best version of themselves as they continually change. Each year the community is different, but the instances Beecher refers to still exist; they just vary based upon the combination of people who make up the community!

This was a year of both small and large changes — some anticipated and others not. One of the most significant changes was in leadership, with Susann Sears serving as acting director due to my appointment as the interim director of the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES). This one change meant that there were new perspectives, questions, and learning that took place among residents, staff, families, as well as for Katherine Johnson, associate director, and Paige Lewis, disability specialist.

In closing, each of the stories shared reflects upon the diverse impact the Beckwith community had on that individual, just as each brightly colored piece does in a kaleidoscope. Intended or not, the Beckwith experience continually impacts each member's personal kaleidoscope long after they leave campus. As we look to celebrate a milestone in equality for people with disabilities, think of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a kaleidoscope. For the past 25 years, people have shared stories about the impact from removing barriers and empowering people with disabilities, and the communities that have formed as a result. As a nation we have much to celebrate with the silver anniversary of the ADA; however, nine years before the ADA was signed into law, Beckwith Hall was established to remove barriers and empower students with the most severe physical disabilities on the University of Illinois campus. Each of our BRSS alumni go out into our society with high expectations of themselves and of the communities in which they live, work and play. As such, BRSS residents and staff impact our larger society making it more inclusive and colorful. It is exciting to think about the future and reflect on how far our country may move forward when the 50th anniversary of the ADA is celebrated — the possibilities are endless, just like the designs within a kaleidoscope.



Susann Sears, Paige Lewis, and Katherine Johnson

A Growing and Changing Kaleidoscope

A Mother and Daughter Share Their Beckwith Experience

by Kelly and Christine Hussey

A Different Perspective

by Kelly Hussey

Being inquisitive probably explains why every time I looked at a kaleidoscope growing up I tried to piece together how it worked; paying attention to what stayed the same with each turn rather than what changed. I find myself doing the same thing now reflecting upon my transition thus far to Beckwith. Undoubtedly my mother being two-and-a-half hours away instead of in the next room was a major adjustment for both of us. Learning to balance so many new elements in my life at once also made the first month a gigantic blur.

I have achieved things I never thought would be possible nine months ago. Tackling the MTD (Champaign-Urbana's Mass Transit Bus Division) is the first accomplishment that comes to mind. But in hindsight, the thing that has surprised me most is what hasn't changed. There are some annoying sides to that. I'm in an entirely new environment and life stage and yet the stuff that continues to cause me the biggest headaches is the same stuff that's been a giant pain to deal with in my life since I can remember. However there is also an upside to this continuous sense of déjà vu. The only reason I was able to make it to Illinois in the first place was because of the support system I had and still have around me. Being in Beckwith has just caused that support system to expand and change. Take my God-awful sense of direction. I wouldn't have been able to get to my classes each semester if it wasn't for my Mom's carefully written turn-by-turn directions, a carryover of how I survived community college. However Paige and some very helpful PAs helped me figure out the bus schedule as a new way of tackling the old problem. And as I discovered, these new ways of handling issues shifted my personal kaleidoscope. Old dreams and ambitions that had been dormant for a while but have been present since before I can remember have come back into the viewfinder. Yes, it is more things I've seen before rearranging themselves, but as the metaphor of the kaleidoscope shows, that can still be beautiful.



Christine and Kelly Hussey



What better way for a rowdy bunch to celebrate the end of the year than with a Luau!

A Changing Kaleidoscope: My U of I Student

by Christine Hussey

I've heard it said that "It takes a village," "Life is a tapestry," or "A changing kaleidoscope is layered and changed by all that have touched it." At times, with Kelly it had seemed like the Humpty Dumpty story, with all the king's men called in to help. Now as I think back, beginning in the neonatal ICU, thru therapies, academics, medical challenges, social situations, etc, the ongoing project that was "Kelly-The Success Story" came with a cast of hundreds. Kelly and I became better prepared because of this journey. We learned our limitations, often reluctantly accepting them but working with or around them. We gained confidence from the perseverance and success of others like us. As mothers gain strength over time to care for their growing children we also become stronger with growth and time.

My daughter Kelly has now finished her first year. Time seems to have flown, but I can still recall the days leading up to move-in and the start of a new, important opportunity in her life. During our Beckwith summer orientation, they asked, "How long are you planning on staying after moving Kelly in?" I thought to myself, huh? Kelly's older sister's move-in was about six hours. I replied, "Haven't given it much thought. How long do parents usually stay?" They replied "Usually two to three days. A few may stay longer, but they are the exception." I figured I'd give it three days.

Over the summer my husband prepared a room layout so I could figure out how to fit the Lazy Boy recliner she wanted, a manual wheelchair, walker, fridge, furniture, etc., and have space to move and reach things as best she could independently. Her "ME Book" rivaled a NASA launch manual, describing detailed routines, needs, contacts, equipment maintenance info, etc. I had lists that had lists of what she would need to survive. I was ready! I thought, let's do this!

It turned out to be a busy three days. While Kelly attended an elaborate orientation, I was consumed in a "Tetris" game, configuring her room and labeling her supplies to be easily found. Kelly was familiar with the "method to my madness." The room was ready, but was I? Was she? Over 21 years, we worked through many developmental milestones, seemingly now, preparing for this day. I had a moment of panic, feeling like I was throwing her into the deep end of the pool, to sink or swim. I tried to remember all the reassurances I'd heard from the "Beckwith Pros." I calmed myself relying on their years of experience. Their methods were proven. Their success stories were many. They helped us prepare for months before now. With guidance from Paige, Kelly's ME Book was a work of art — an endless resource. Thanks to Katherine, Kelly's PA needs were fully staffed from the lists of PAs provided. DRES had her books converted, ready for classes to begin. Connections with other new Beckwith students and her suitemate had been made, thanks to communications from Paige. The time had come. I wasn't doing this solo; we had a team at Illinois that knew their stuff!

At this point I recognize that the demands and expectations on her have been greater than ever in the past. Independence has been taken to a much higher level. And you know, she's doing a pretty good job of it! She's preparing for her second year with a confidence and enthusiasm that keeps growing. The encouragement, support and training provided by Paige, Katherine, Susann, the PAs, DAs, dining staff, Profs, counselors & DRES staff are integral to her success. Like those who were so important in her past development, they are adding their individual contributions to the growing and changing kaleidoscope that is my U of I student, (brag, brag), Kelly Hussey.

Inner Workings

by Daniel Escalona
Matthew A. Odelius Award Recipient



As the recipient of the Matthew A. Odelius award this year, I am proud to reflect upon my contribution to the inner workings in the Beckwith and university communities. This award celebrates the accomplishments of a former Beckwith resident, by recognizing a fellow Beckwith resident demonstrating leadership in student organizations while balancing academics and other commitments.

As a kid, I always recall marveling at the inner workings of a kaleidoscope as its mirrors work in unison to create mosaics of vibrant light. To this day, though my days as a curious child are now distant memories, I remain fascinated with how things work — including things in my own life.

In many ways, the University of Illinois and Beckwith can be seen as kaleidoscopes of individuals. We come from different backgrounds — different majors, interests, personalities and aspirations — to form a vibrant community. This metaphor reflects my own experience and how my roles have changed as a Beckwith resident, student, and Daily Illini sports writer over the last three years.

When I first arrived on campus, I was filled with all sorts of fears and anxieties, everything from dealing with PA staff I never met before to explaining to a different floater each night how to turn me, to coping with a difficult class with an obstinate professor. Luckily, I had a group of mentors that revealed to me that the struggles and obstacles I was fretting over were merely aspects of my time in Beckwith, fading in no time yet allowing me to thrive as a member of the community. I still owe a lot to the mentors that enabled me to become who I am today — many of whom I still rely on for advice.

Imagine two years later my role evolving where I'm now a mentor for the first year residents. This allows me to take some of them "beneath my wing" to hear my stories towards gaining independence while balancing friends, and extracurricular activities. This experience refreshed my memory on the struggles that first-year residents endure, as I recall contending with the same issues, to which I now have more empathy. Though the success of the residents I mentored is their own doing, I can slightly detect my influence.

Being a mentor is just one of the small ways in which I contribute to the inner workings of the Beckwith community in making it such a special place to live. The word kaleidoscope comes from the Greek meaning "observation of beautiful forms," and that is just what I see when I look back at my contributions to the community this year. My role in the community as a mentor, and the role of every other resident, PA and administrator, represent the mirrors working in unison inside the kaleidoscope — all working to form a vibrant community of individuals that all contribute to the community in a unique way.



Left: Dan with Paige at the DRES Awards Program.

Right: Dan, Kristin, Larkin, and Jordan during New Student Orientation.





Beckwith: A Kaleidoscope of Strengths

by Emily Schuette

I first joined the Beckwith team in August 2013 when I was privately hired as a Personal Assistant (PA) by one of the students living on the floor. Then and there I knew that this job was going to be one of the greatest experiences of my college career. However, it was not until I became an intern for Beckwith one year later that I would fully understand what this program is all about, and just how much of a community it really is.

There were two major parts to my internship. First, I assisted Beckwith's first Parkland Pathway student in making a smooth transition to both the University of Illinois and Parkland College campuses. Second, as one of the teaching assistants in a class dedicated to their first semester transition, I had the opportunity to assist the new Beckwith students in their first months at Beckwith and the University of Illinois. This class entailed a strengths-based approach, which allowed the students, the instructors, and myself to understand not only our own strengths, but also everyone else's strengths in the class. When the students worked together I had the opportunity to watch everyone's different strengths intertwine and feed off of one another, creating new ideas, much like a kaleidoscope of colors. Each week that we met, each student's strengths became more and more prevalent. Watching the students benefit from using their strengths positively made my experience worthwhile.

No two Beckwith students are the same, just as no two staff members are the same. Beckwith is a place that interchanges the ideas and strengths of a large number of wonderful people, making this community unique and beneficial for all who are involved. This community taught me much more than I ever anticipated, and honestly changed my life. Words cannot describe how grateful I am to have been a part of this community. The experiences I have received from Beckwith are ones I could never experience in a classroom, and ones that I will be able to take with me in my graduate studies and professional career.



2014-2015 first-year residents and those who supported them.

A Year at Beckwith...



Left:
Comedian,
Zach Anner
checking out
Beckwith after
speaking at the
Illinois Interfaith
Conference,
co-sponsored by
DRES.



Right:
Enjoying a study
break at the UI
Ice Arena.



Left:
Charlie and Elissa
— PAs and good
cooks. Lucky us!



Right:
Saturday
breakfast — a
group effort!



Left:
Hey, Hey, the
gangs all here!



Right:
Dan, Luis, Millie
& Nathan
are ready for
halloween.



Left:
RaeAnne
helping to make
cupcakes.



Right: Jordan,
David, Henry,
Stephen & Aaron
stuffed after the
“Friendsgiving
Feast.”



Left:
Mark awarding
his PA Kelly
the 2015
Anne Hopkins
Scholarship.



Right:
Millie, Luis, Sarah
& Maddi heading
to the ice skating
party.



Left:
Dr. Tim Nugent
and Dean Tanya
Gallagher with
Senator Mark
Kirk during his
visit to Nugent
Hall & Beckwith.



Right:
Maddi, Ali, Kristyn
& Emily at end of
the year luau.

Being a Part of the Pattern

by Kushal Parikh



There is no way to give you a complete picture of what the Beckwith Community is. It is something that needs to be experienced first-hand. But maybe, just maybe, I can give you a glimpse by telling you what the Beckwith community has done for me.

To me, it goes back to the concept of tabula rasa or “blank slate” for those of you that have never taken a psychology course. When I moved into Beckwith for the first time, I was a blank slate, completely oblivious to the ways of the world. Most of the knowledge I had was from textbooks or the internet, as I had little to no life experience. What can I say? I was a sheltered, nerdy kid from suburbia! The little self-awareness I had told me that something was missing in my simpleton life. So, despite my family’s reservations I moved to Champaign to experience college life.

I was excited, but I was also fearful about living on my own. During my second week at the U of I, my friend Hugo and I took a walk through the quad to de-stress. We talked about how we felt like we were not cut out for independent living; we even considered calling it quits and going home. But, by the end of our long discussion, I realized that the best part of the Beckwith community was that I did not have to do it all on my own. I had Hugo (who was facing the same growing pains as I) and mentors (who had been through it all before us) to confide in. No matter what challenges I faced, at the end of the day I had a community that empathized.

The beauty of it all is that you come in wide-eyed and ready to struggle till you find your path and you go out into the real world the same way, but the Beckwith community always has your back. It is like what you see when looking into a kaleidoscope, each individual pattern is a generation of residents where each color in the pattern is an individual resident. When one patterns ends, another begins. Are you ready to begin a new pattern?

“The best part of the Beckwith community was that I did not have to do it all on my own. At the end of the day I had a community that empathized.”



Karaoke time!



The Key to my Success

by Corey Hyslop

In 2007, my life changed forever when I was in a high-speed motorcycle accident. This accident resulted in a spinal injury that may have shaped my physical attributes. However, it did not affect my capabilities as a newfound individual with a disability. This accident happened during my junior year of college and after one year of rehabilitation, I found the strength to pursue the Beckwith program and finish my college degree in Economics. My family has been instrumental in helping me through this process and although these relationships can be difficult at times, fostering them is the key to success when you're in college. Shortly after graduation, I decided to pursue a Master's degree in Human Resources at Illinois and further my education. This proved to be one of the best moves I have made in my life. Because of the fact that I took school seriously, life is much more manageable from an independence and financial standpoint. After completion, I found a full-time job in Washington, D.C., working for a Government Defense Contractor that hired me because of my abilities, not my appearance.

I try to give back to Illinois as much as I can. Recently, I helped facilitate the gift of Northrop Grumman giving \$200,000 to build a computer lab at the new Center for Wounded Veterans in Higher Education. I think if we want to have a community that can grow, it's important to help each other get to the next step. Sometimes it takes a lot of work, but that work pays off if you can help another achieve a goal or create independence for them. The Beckwith program was instrumental in expanding my kaleidoscope from a narrow window immediately after my accident, into an infinite number of possibilities, people, and diversities. Although that kaleidoscope continues to change, I recognize that I have the ability to impact what it becomes based upon the relationships I develop, the risks that I take and most importantly by never losing sight of my personal conviction that I can handle it.



The Chez Family Foundation Center for Wounded Veterans in Higher Education opened in the fall of 2015.

Creating a Vision

by Kristin Kohn
Disability Advocate (DA)



Every time a kaleidoscope is rotated, the sight adjusts. Diverse colors interact and grow as a colliding pattern. Within our community, each member brings value to the table. Each individual acts as a color and shape of the kaleidoscope to create that image we all seek to understand and appreciate. This helps everyone to paint a picture of a vision to work towards. Within Beckwith, empowering residents to create a dream for themselves and develop a strategic plan is the impact we all hope to make.

For a social work graduate student hoping to make an impression on the world, my “aha” moment occurred on a night full of singing and laughter over karaoke. It hit me! Imprinting an influence on the world does not require inventing a world-renowned program to reduce stigma and oppression. Simple bonds and connectedness within a small community presents a magical opportunity. The principles discovered through the halls of Beckwith can pave a path for inspirational momentum to make a difference in the lives of each person we meet.

Susann, Paige, and Katherine developed my sense of leadership through their mentorship. My fellow DA and now dear friend, Alyssa, developed my sense of worth and created a standard for my vision of partnership. The PAs developed my vision of teamwork and understanding. Finally, the residents developed

my sense of energy, spirit, and gratitude by teaching me what value truly means. Every individual influences others in resounding ways. This creates the opportunity to pay it forward by empowering new people we meet to create value within themselves and their communities. My experience in Beckwith has ingrained a lifelong gratitude and motivation in me to live by the notion that “relationships build leadership, and leadership builds influence,” as John Maxwell says. My vision is simple. Each resident remembers their worth and uses that to create powerful influences.



Alyssa and Kristin, the dynamic duo.



A Magical View

by Alyssa Hunter
Disability Advocate (DA)

If you look at a Kaleidoscope from the outside, it is clear to see that in a small space there are many different pieces and colors that can be moved around depending on how a person holds it. But if you look a little closer, and concentrate your vision, a kaleidoscope no longer looks like a jumble of different pieces. Instead, the pieces come together to create a magical view that could not be possible without each other.

When I arrived, Beckwith appeared as a jumble of new people, experiences, and personalities all in one hallway. In the first few weeks of the school year I could not imagine how every single student and staff member would contribute to the beautiful community we would become. As I became more immersed into the community, and focused my vision on the friendships and development that was blossoming around me, I knew I was in the most beautiful colorful place on campus.

I went here for undergrad as well, and so I have had four years in Champaign with different living experiences, but nothing comes close to the bonds within the Beckwith community. There is not another place where you could sit in a hallway of students ranging from freshman to grad students, of all different backgrounds, beliefs, ambitions and abilities and discuss the complexities of life. The bonds between the students have shown me true friendship. The dedication of the staff has shown me compassion on the brightest as well as the most trying days. The commitment of the administration has taught me how to navigate the intricacies of the unexpected. And Kristin, my co-disability advocate, has confirmed to me that two heads are always better than one. I am honored to have been part of this extraordinary community booming with energy and beauty supporting each other.



Alyssa and the gang on the Quad.

Creating a Colorful Community (CCC): We Are a Kaleidoscope!

by Angelica Sanchez



During the beginning stages as a personal assistant (PA), you could say I was a viewer of an extraordinary kaleidoscope — a variation of backgrounds, characters, and understandings. It was extraordinary in that I felt intimacy radiating between the experienced PAs and the residents. It's what we would call a sense of community, even if I understood myself to be a temporary spectator navigating through this kaleidoscope. The intimacy does not solely exist between residents and PAs, but it manifests itself between the experienced and the newbies. Whether it is a long-standing resident and a new PA or returning PAs with new PAs, the opportunity for a growing relationship is always there. But as I learned it is up to each individual to nurture these relationships.

For my integration into this existing community, I was mentored by an experienced PA. I will be forever grateful to this individual who showed me the steps of working with Beckwith residents. This demonstrates not only the epitome of community but also the affection within it. We are performing a job, but we also are forming lifelong friendships.

Each relationship within Beckwith can be seen as a shape in the kaleidoscope and each new arrangement of shapes and colors represents changing skills, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings. Here at Beckwith, we do not let individuals struggle alone. We share our pasts to empower this collective mosaic of shifting dynamics among residents, PAs, Disability Advocates, and administrators.

We learn together as a collective because we are humans experiencing with one another. Ultimately, we grow together as college students and we learn how to be professionals together.

“As personal assistants, we are performing a job, but we are also forming lifelong friendships.”



Angelica and fellow PA Amanda pose on the Quad.



An Evolving Community

by Rachel Graddy, OTD, OTR/L

When I think of my time in the Beckwith community, I can find no description more fitting than that of a kaleidoscope. Beckwith, much like the images inside a kaleidoscope, is ever evolving to not just accommodate, but to welcome new students, PAs — and in my case, staff — into this tightly bonded community.

I cannot emphasize enough what a privilege it has been to work in and become a part of this community this year. When I first arrived, I was a shy occupational therapy intern armed with research and just a dream to work in a setting like Beckwith. Through a lot of effort coupled with the overwhelming support of students and staff, I was able to become the first part-time occupational therapist at Beckwith! I am so grateful to the students who worked tirelessly in therapy sessions with me to increase independence, health benefits and functionality. I very easily could have been another therapist in their myriad of health routines that were simply written off, but they adopted and embraced me and my skill set so wholeheartedly. More than anything, I was not only made to feel welcome but I was accepted into the Beckwith community, and for that I am incredibly grateful.

I have learned so much during this past year. While my skills as an occupational therapist have improved in leaps and bounds as students have presented me with increasingly unique challenges, I can honestly say that

I have grown considerably as a person from getting to know the residents, PAs and administrators. I will never forget the times spent hanging out after art class, celebrating acceptances into graduate school, or just chatting about food or our current Netflix obsessions. Because of the social connections formed, students' occupational therapy victories became not just reinforcements of my clinical skills, but triumphs I celebrated with friends. We can never predict what the future holds for us, but I know that my life is so much brighter for having been a part of the Beckwith kaleidoscope.



Kelsey and Rachel at the UI Ice Arena.

Beckwith Residential Support Services
Timothy J. Nugent Hall
207 East Gregory Drive, MC-540
Champaign, Illinois 61820

Non-Profit Org.
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Permit No. 75
Champaign, IL 61820

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