



My Place at the Table

On Friday, May 21st, approximately 30 people heard the remarkable story of one man growing up in an institution, what he endured, the many losses in his life, and how having relationships and valued social roles made all the difference for him. The talk was part of a series called Table Talks, organized by the SRV Implementation Project. It focuses on putting Social Role Valorization into practice. Many thanks to Michael for so graciously sharing his story.

Michael was born in a town north of Boston in 1955. His records state that his home life was unstable and tumultuous resulting in Michael going in and out of facilities for 'testing' as a very young boy and finally ending up at the Paul A. Dever State School for the next 17 years. Dever State School, later called the Paul A. Dever Developmental Center was the largest state operated institution for people with intellectual and physical impairments that operated between 1952-2002; at one point housing over 1700 people. Prior to this being an institution, it was called Camp Myles Standish and was used by the army for deployment and reinstatement of soldiers, as well as being used as a prisoner of war site.



Michael's records state that he was a 'pleasant looking boy who was active, and inquisitive, walked at age 2, had some trouble with his speech and was toilet trained and able to feed and dress himself'. Within months of his admission, he was diagnosed and treated for hepatitis and German measles; both very common diseases for people living in unhygienic conditions.

While at Dever State School, Michael shared a room with about 35 other men. He did not have any personal possessions because they were stolen, so his clothes were brought to him by an attendant every day. Michael was physically capable and strong and spent many years doing hard labor at the institution for no pay. During this time, he had x-rays of his left wrist and forearm, jaw, cheek, skull, ankles, stomach, thumb, hand, arm, shoulder, GI tract, lungs, gall bladder, both feet and his toes and was treated for abdominal pain, vomiting and anorexia. He had teeth removed and other medical procedures with no anesthesia. Michael still has health issues as a result of the poor care and trauma he was subjected to.

In 1978, at the age of 22, Michael was moved to an 8 person group home based solely on his ability to get out of the house within 2.5 minutes when the fire alarm went off. Due to his limited schooling and few life experiences or incidental life learning on which to draw and the lack of an adequate support system, Michael made some poor decisions and got himself into trouble. He spent the next several years in and out of restrictive environments until Lou Nisenbaum, the then Executive Director of The Nemasket Group, was asked to step in. Lou and Michael knew each other from Dever as Lou was an employee when Michael lived there.

Lou guided Michael for the next 25 years in building a life for himself by acquiring valued social roles. He helped Michael to reconnect with his family in Maine, to have a safe and stable home with privacy and proper supports, and to get a job. Lou knew that Michael had some healing to do as well. He helped Michael to have typical experiences by celebrating holidays and dinners with Lou's family, to go on vacations, to give back to others by volunteering and helping, to be known in the community by being in the community, to explore and develop interests and hobbies, and to develop natural and freely given relationships. As a result and thanks to Lou, as well as many other people, Michael's life is much richer today.

When we look back, we can see all the negatively valued roles Michael had while growing up and as a young man: foster child, a resident of an institution, adult foster client, a group home client, a menace, a patient, and many others. Today, his life is much different. Michael is a friend, a gardener, an employee, a community members, a neighbor, a helper, a family member, a boyfriend, a student, a brother, an uncle, a volunteer, and so much more. He is known, respected, and deeply loved by many.

Michaels' story is a remarkable journey and lesson in how if we hold positive expectations about a person's capacity for learning and growth, then we are more likely to provide relevant opportunities and have high expectations for them. By Michael living in a typical home, engaged in ordinary life, surrounded by others who believed in his ability, by holding meaningful jobs that he is paid for and learns from, and having people stand by him and walk with him, his life is rich and full. And we are richer people for knowing Michael and all he has taught us.

~ Written by Karin Bonesteel



People who fill roles that are valued by others (example: photographer, employee, co-worker, voter, musician, volunteer, college student) will be granted the good things of life.

Our 2021 Employee of the Year

We are happy to announce **Susan Kallio** as our *2021 Employee of the Year*. Susan is an extremely dedicated employee who always goes the extra mile to ensure that the individuals she works with get the support and opportunities they need to be fully included in their communities. She understands the importance of developing meaningful valued social roles for those she supports and she has a “natural” way of going about her work, demonstrating that she has a clear passion for what she does.

The Nemasket Group is fortunate to have so many wonderful and dedicated people working for the organization. We want to acknowledge the other employees who were also nominated for the *2021 Employee of the Year Award* (Justin Laurianno, Baithan Raposo, Patrick Russell, and Chelsea Wynne). Congratulations to Susan and all of the nominees.



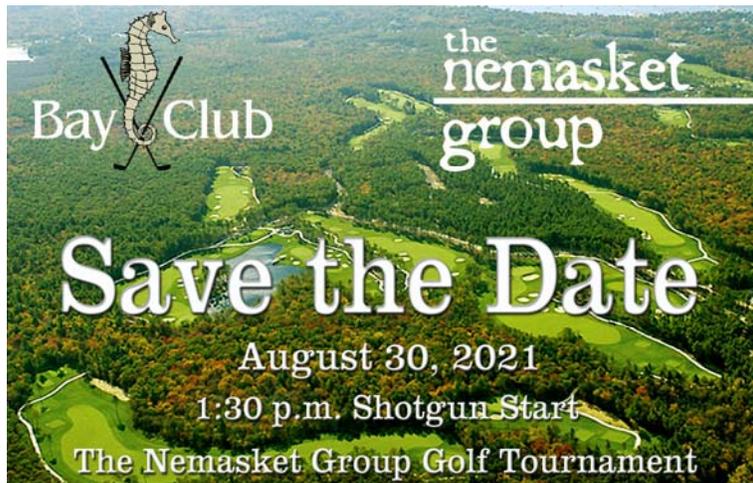
On behalf of the Board of Directors, the 5K Walk/Run Committee, our staff, and the individuals served by *The Nemasket Group*, we want to thank all of those who participated in our annual 5K Walk/Run. We especially want to acknowledge our major sponsors, Bank5, Symmons, Patricia Stone – In Memory of Conrad Stone, Guard Oil and Claremont Companies. Thanks to our generous sponsors and donors we are happy to say that all of the monies raised for this event will go directly to our programs and services. Your partnership with us really does make a difference!



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