

BECKWITH *News*

A Newsletter of Beckwith Residential Support Services

Fall 2014

Nugent Hall | University Housing
College of Applied Health Sciences



ILLINOIS

Ubuntu = Beckwith

by Patricia B. Malik, Ph.D., Director



Who makes up the Beckwith community? Some might say that it is the 26 residents who live on the first floor of Nugent Hall. Wrong! Okay, so add in the 80+ personal assistants who support those residents. Getting closer! Well, how about including the administrative staff? Almost there! The Beckwith community surely includes all of the above as well as all those previous residents and staff who have come before this year's very unique group, all the way back to the program's beginning in 1981. Each of us who are part of today's Beckwith is bound together with those in our present life, and those who came before us. This connectedness can be found in the South African concept of Ubuntu that goes as far back as 1846. Desmond Tutu stated, "Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself . . . We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity."

Within this newsletter you will meet some of those who, through their lives, affected the University of Illinois and future Beckwith residents. They have written about this Beckwith connectedness in profound ways. And while we have residents and staff who have reached life goals, personal growth occurs in the smaller daily life events: sharing a meal and the day's adventures at the IKE; hanging out in the hallway of Nugent; making s'mores at a fall bonfire while talking about being thankful for each other; organizing "Wheelies for Life," a team for the University Relay for Life event that raised over \$1,000 for the American Cancer Society; using extra credits from meal plans to buy items at 57 North for the local food pantry; getting dressed up for an end-of-the-year semi-formal and celebrating friendship; and visiting a friend who was hospitalized. YES, I am who I am because of who you are!

Finally, the following are highlights of those who have achieved life goals or received recognition of their "Ubuntu":

- Seven residents are transitioning to other residential environments in the fall: Caitlin Bottcher, Mary Griffith, Erik Jenkins, Phil Mungai, Taylor Hattori, Jacob Head, and Kristin Paus. They are ready for the new adventure and becoming part of a new living community. However, they will always be part of the Beckwith community.
- Hugo Trevino traveled to Taiwan and Hong Kong with Megan Kirby as his personal assistant during winter break. Hugo and Megan's community widened greatly through this adventure.
- Kathleen Downes received the University's DiversityEd Outstanding Undergraduate Award. Check out her blog entitled "Squeaky Wheelchair."
- Five residents received scholarships/awards at the annual DRES/DSO spring program: David Kirby, Alexis Wernsing, Kathleen Downes, Meridith Bradford, and Erik Jenkins.
- Megan Kirby, a Beckwith personal assistant, received the Annie Hopkins Scholarship, established by her brother Stevie in her memory. Both are Illinois and Beckwith alumni.
- Hugo Trevino, Ian Nelson, and Stephanie Zaia graduated with their bachelor degrees and will be bringing the Beckwith community into their future endeavors.

It is my hope that by reading and reflecting on the words in this newsletter, you will feel connected and bound up with all that the Beckwith community is about, "Making important choices – Leading empowered lives."



University of Illinois = Ubuntu

by Brad Hedrick, Ph.D., Director of DRES

As we reflect on the 32nd year of Beckwith Residential Support Services, it is clear that the program continues to function as a vibrantly active and engaged community. Holding true to its transitional mission, BRSS has prepared seven residents for the transition to other residential environments in Fall 2014. The program's transitional effectiveness will undoubtedly continue to improve through the ongoing refinement of an innovative one-hour credit course introduced last year to support students in the fulfillment of their Disability Management Program goals.

Other highlights of the past year's accomplishments include: a resident who traveled to Hong Kong with a personal assistant during semester break; the recognition of five residents with named scholarships for distinguished academic and/or service accomplishments; the selection of a BRSS personal assistant as the recipient of the Annie Hopkins Scholarship; the awarding of the University's DiversityEd Outstanding Undergraduate Award to a BRSS resident for her outstanding blog entitled *Squeaky Wheelchair*; and last but not least, the awarding of baccalaureate degrees this spring to Hugo Trevino, Ian Nelson, and Stephanie Zaia.

As you read this year's *Beckwith News*, you cannot help but note the synergies at work in this extraordinarily dynamic context. Residents are empowered to take on challenges that they only a year or so earlier would have considered impossible, and personal assistants are immersed in experiences that positively and forever change how they see themselves both personally and professionally.

Clearly, Beckwith Residential Support Services continues to be an amazingly interconnected, active, and uniquely successful community in helping students with disabilities fulfill their educational and professional goals. However, in the spirit of Ubuntu, we must acknowledge that BRSS is what it is because of the unwavering commitment of a great university to provide unparalleled access for those with the most severe physical disabilities. Indeed, we are who we are because of what the University of Illinois is!



2013 Disability Awareness Attendees

Empowering Each Other

A Brother and Sister Share Their Beckwith Experience

by David and Megan Kirby

Community Comes First

by David Kirby

I hear Beckwith described as many things – a unique concept, trendsetting, state-of-the-art – but it is much less often described as a strong community. Though being a strong community sounds less exciting than being a unique concept, I believe the community aspect of Beckwith has far more to do with the success of the program.

I often attribute my collegiate success to my own personal merit, but without the Beckwith community I would not be where I am today. Within the Beckwith community, I depend on other people, whether it be my PAs for physical care, my educational assistants for transcribing my homework, the other residents for emotional support, and even the building service workers for doing my laundry, cleaning my room, and taking out my garbage. Each of the groups of people I mentioned has, in some way, contributed to my success during my time here. Instead of attributing my accomplishments entirely to myself, I can just as easily say it has been a team effort.

It has certainly been a rewarding experience to be a part of that team. However, an equally rewarding experience is being a part of the success of others. I would like to think that I play a similar role for others as they have for me. My PAs gain career experience as well as a fresh perspective on the difficulties in their own lives. I feel I set a good example for the younger residents, and hopefully they can learn from my mistakes.



My time at Beckwith has shown me the importance of depending on others and working as a team. It has taught me how closely interdependent we all are. If I tried to figure out whether I contributed more to the success of others or they contributed more to mine, I don't think I would be able to do so. I don't think you can have one without the other.

Beckwith is often described as a unique concept, trendsetting, and state-of-the-art, but when I mention Beckwith, "community" is what I say first.

David and Megan share a special bond as siblings and employer/employee.

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Permanently Connected

by Megan Kirby

I came into college as an immature freshman, looking for a part-time job to make some extra cash. I had known about the option of being a personal assistant because my brother had been a Beckwith resident for two years prior to my arrival at the University of Illinois. I figured it would be a laid-back, flexible job. Four years later, I realize that working as a personal assistant meant so much more to me than just earning a paycheck.

To my brother, thank you for giving me the pleasure of being one of your personal assistants these past four years. I know that we have probably argued more than you do with your other personal assistants, but overall it has been a blast. Having you around every time I went to one of my shifts was comforting, whether I needed to vent to you or just needed to share a laugh.

To everyone I have worked for these past four years, thank you for teaching me a new meaning of responsibility and maturity. You have taught me to put other people's needs before my own, while at the same time helping me realize how much I love helping other people. Because of this, I am pursuing a Master of Science degree in Nursing, and will be able to continue providing care for people. Thank you for all of the fun and silly memories I made at Beckwith that will stick with me forever, whether it be accidentally sticking my finger up someone's nose, or grabbing someone's arms to make them do the Macarena while jamming to music during my shift. And, most importantly, thank you for being a second family to me while I was away from home. I know that our friendships will last long after I leave Illinois, and that everything I learned from being a personal assistant has prepared me to go into the healthcare field. Because of this, I will always feel connected to Beckwith.



2014 DRES/DSO Awards Ceremony. David and Megan were both scholarship recipients. Kushal Parikh and Hugo Trevino nominated Megan for the Annie Hopkins Scholarship.



Megan and the crew at the Tie Dye party.

I am Who I am Because of You

by Meridith (Mer) Bradford
Matthew A. Odelius Award Recipient



I am extremely honored to be this year's recipient of the Matthew A. Odelius Award. This award celebrates the accomplishments of a student with a physical disability residing at Beckwith who has demonstrated leadership in student organizations while balancing academics and other commitments.

With this being just my sophomore year, it is unbelievable how much I have grown in my time thus far here at Illinois. I think that the journey I took to get to this point in my life truly embodies the concept of "I am who I am because of you." Honestly, coming to this university was not my original plan. The combination of the extensive disability services, a good reputation for sport management, and being offered a managing position for the wheelchair basketball program made it seem like a perfect fit. Being from New Jersey, I was extremely scared to be so far away from home and doubted this decision more than once. Naturally, my disability forces me to rely on others to a certain extent. At the same time, I feel that my life has been entirely shaped by people who would have never crossed my path had I not needed a little bit of extra help.

My biggest strength has always come from growing up going to a summer camp for kids with disabilities and illnesses. I thank my camp family for giving me the confidence that I could live as independently as possible. This helped me transition into the Beckwith community with an understanding that there are other people in similar situations to mine. Outside of the residential aspect, Illinois has given me the resources to pursue a career in making a difference for athletes with disabilities. Connections I have made in our adaptive athletics program have allowed me to further myself as an athlete, manager, and advocate. The wheelchair basketball program has really given me a purpose for being here and pushed me to excel academically and beyond. The combination of educational, career, and social opportunities presented to me here is not available anywhere else in the country. I look forward to seeing where this road will lead and influencing people along the way as much as they have influenced me.



Paige Lewis presenting Mer with the 2014 Matthew A. Odelius Award.



Social life: Being a part of the "Wheelies for Life" team.



Because it Takes an Army

by RaeAnne Lindsay

Coming to the University of Illinois was scary because I had never before lived outside of my home without my parents. But then I learned this phrase, “I am who I am because of who you are,” and it helped me realize, in my heart, that I could do this. I am who I am because of my parents always being there for me. They pushed me when I was younger to become the person that I needed to be. My friends are also a big part of me becoming the person that I am today. They may not even know it, but they helped me grow into a strong individual who knew that this was what I wanted to do next in my life.

Ultimately, it was a chance encounter in the local Sam’s Club with Katherine Johnson, Beckwith’s Associate Director, mentioning the program and inviting us to tour Nugent Hall. It opened my eyes to a whole new world. I convinced myself and my family that I knew I was ready for the challenge of being at the University of Illinois because I saw that I had become the person that I wanted to be. I had grown up so much over the past years that I knew I was ready and that the Beckwith program would help me in areas that I needed to work on more. I knew that my family and friends would be there if I needed them. There was an amazing team here that I knew would help me, too. I looked at Beckwith as another place that I could grow even more.

When I was younger, I had someone tell me that this world was not going to be easy and that I needed to get ready to face it. Every time a challenge comes up that I do not think I can face, I remember this phrase and I know that I have a whole team of people around who are not just going to help me face this challenge, but also help me become even more of the person that I want and am meant to be.



RaeAnne and Mark at the Great Gatsby semi-formal.



Kelsey and RaeAnne (Sigma Kappa sisters) at their sorority's semi-formal dance.

A Year at Beckwith...



Kushal, Megan and Hugo sporting their tattoos of honor.

The journey of 3E Love actually began in 2004 when Annie created the 'wheelchair heart symbol' design for a Beckwith T-shirt while she and Stevie were undergraduate students together at the University of Illinois. At that time, neither of them had any clue what they had stumbled onto nor fully grasped the potential and meaning of Annie's creation. A glance at their website emphasizes how a simple idea in college has grown into an "international movement of acceptance."



Tracy Kleparski, Assistant Director of Campus Recreation–Inclusion, highlighting areas of interest within the Activities and Recreation Center (ARC) during new student orientation.



Alex Whiteland and Grant Davis catching up with fellow Beckwith Alum, and keynote speaker Sam Williams before the Disability Awareness Program.



Jacob and Angela at the semi-formal.



Steph and Izzy at AHS Convocation.



It's the Beckwith bobsled team—Kushal, Michael, Ian, and David.



Susann Sears with Erik.



Wearing the "Fruit of the Loom" of their labor.



It might have been warmer and lighter the second time around, but the camaraderie was unchanged during the end-of-year bonfire.



Kyle and R.J. Mitte from the TV series "Breaking Bad." R.J. Mitte starred as Walter White's (Bryan Cranston) son on the award-winning show, AMC's "Breaking Bad." Like his character, he has cerebral palsy, albeit a milder version. Mitte is involved with many organizations that raise awareness for equality and diversity, including his role as Youth Spokesperson for the National Disability Institute's Real Economic Tour.



Miss Piggy and Big Bird crashing Beckwith's Halloween party.

A Stronger Bond between Us

by Nadia Chumbipuma



I found out about the Beckwith community through an old friend of mine with whom I used to work, Philip Edgerley. At the beginning of his senior year he recommended that I apply to Beckwith so that once he graduated, I would still have a job. I had always told him that I enjoyed working as a PA and how I wanted to continue doing it. Soon after applying, I received a call to come in for an interview and begin the hiring process.

My interest in becoming a PA began with my choice of pursuing a career in physical therapy. I believed this career would allow me to help others recover physically and mentally. Not only that, but I also knew that as a physical therapist I would be able to grow and make a difference in someone's life.

I started as a PA to one of the Beckwith residents. Of course I was nervous! I had only worked with one person, Phil, for a whole year. In fact, I was a little intimidated because I didn't know many of the staff or residents. However, over the next few months I had the chance to meet several residents. I enjoyed getting to know them, and sometimes going in for a shift felt more like catching up with a friend than actually working. The community at Beckwith always reminded me of a family. Everyone was always open to new people and willing to have a small talk when they got the chance.

As I finished my first year at Beckwith, I realized how much I had learned. I have seen how helping others can benefit everyone. The concept of Ubuntu that states "we are successful when we help others become more successful" truly resonates within each resident of the Beckwith community. Once I become a physical therapist, I hope to carry on this philosophy with my patients and coworkers in order to create a stronger bond between us.

*"Making important choices...
Leading empowered lives."*



BECKWITH RESIDENTIAL
SUPPORT SERVICES

Beckwith Values = Ubuntu

What is important to our community

Engage in honest, genuine and
respectful **COMMUNICATION**

•
BUILD UP the Beckwith
community in words and actions
of integrity

•
Take **PERSONAL**
RESPONSIBILITY for life choices

•
RESPECT self and others of all
abilities

•
OPEN MINDED to new
experiences



Blessed by a Random Job

by Shelby Wills

I first came to Beckwith as a brand new freshman on campus. I had not really made any new friends yet. One of my first days on campus I went over to Nugent Hall to begin my job training as a private hire for Ani Hunt, also a new resident on campus. Before this job I had no previous experience working with students with disabilities, but I knew I had a passion for helping people and that this job sounded perfect. Throughout that first semester, I watched Ani's transition from living at home her entire life to living on her own and managing her own staff through the Beckwith Program.

Watching her gain her independence and become a stronger person helped me in my own transition into this new college life. I slowly started to find my home with the Beckwith community, meeting more residents and becoming a floater. I found myself at home at Nugent and began to form real friendships with multiple students. Finishing off my last year here as a live-in PA, I can only look back and be grateful for the wonderful, humbling students whose lives I got to be a part of. I have learned so much about myself and my own strengths through helping the students here find theirs. I am happy to call Beckwith my home—a place where I could sleep in the hallway or have an all-day movie marathon while eating way too much takeout.

Together, our Beckwith community has shouldered the good, the bad, and the ugly. My friends here have helped me be successful at college, encouraging me and listening to me when needed. When I realized all of this started with a random job my freshman year, I can only feel blessed. Leaving this place will be difficult, but the friendships and community I have become a part of here will always stay with me.



Ani and Henry, enjoying birthday cupcakes, joined by stripes and frosting.



Drew and Shelby.

Community = Connectedness!

by Kate Soloman
Disability Advocate (DA)

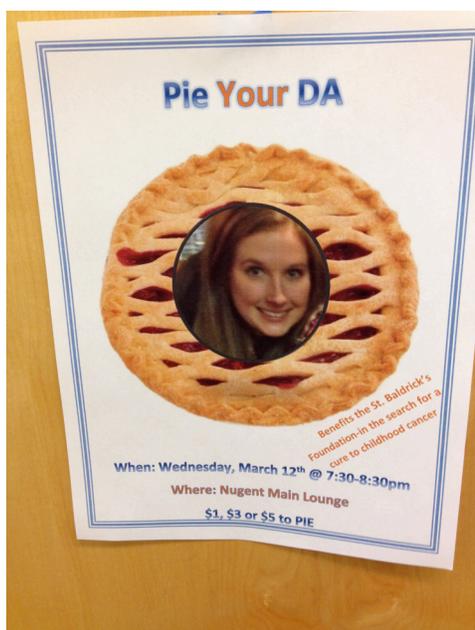


Ubuntu: “I am who I am because of who you are.” Each of us is an individual, we come to every situation with different experiences that shape who we are. People who have gone in and out of my life and both the good and bad experiences I have had shape ME. I am only one individual in this deeply connected community that was established last year. As I reflect on the year, I realize the impact this community will have on the rest of my life.

I accepted the position as a disability advocate with some trepidation. I had never worked with individuals with physical disabilities and I knew there would be some major changes moving to Champaign. I put my fears aside and jumped right into two weeks of training with Bobby. I am so thankful that Bobby and I had an instant bond over goals, similar interests, and life philosophies. We hoped that everyone would come with an open mind, would be accepting of one another, and would be open to establishing a new sense of community.

Within the first few weeks of getting to know one another our personal connections grew stronger and our community began to form. We bonded over long chats in the hallway, sharing a meal, a good cry behind closed doors, and fun programs throughout the semester. I remember thinking in August that some of us had never met and by the time winter break came we were calling ourselves a family. The bonfire that wrapped up first semester was the perfect way to reflect on our appreciation for the community we had established.

I am thankful for the many relationships I have developed during my time at Beckwith. I am thankful to Pat, Paige, and Katherine who shared their wisdom and experience with me. I am thankful for the knowledge and level of awareness that I have gained from each student living at Beckwith. Words cannot explain how incredibly fortunate and grateful I am to be a part of such an extraordinary community.



Kate takes a pie for the team!



Connection = Humanity

by Bobby Bingle
Disability Advocate (DA)

I take Ubuntu to mean a connection and bond between all humans. This is a rather sweeping concept upon first encounter. Am I somehow connected to all humans before me and contiguous to me? Do I have a share in this tiny occurrence in the universe known as humanity? Maybe...

Sometimes I find it difficult to think about these large ideas. There is a bang. Amoebas wiggle around. Mammals decide to catch some sun and get out of the water. Apes use rocks to crack things open. A twenty-five-year-old tourism student winds up at a place called Beckwith.

On the other hand, these thoughts of a connection of humanity and the swirling of the universe are not so big. Actually, these ideas are quite small. I cannot hear them. I cannot touch them. They do not make me laugh. They are musings meant for long bus rides and late night trips home from Green Street.

A smile from the person sitting across from me in the dining hall is larger than any far off planet. A good story told around a late fall bonfire is longer than the entire Mayan empire. Singing along to *Frozen* with friends is louder than the crack of any supernova.

I do not know to what or to whom I am connected to in the grand scheme of things. But I know that hanging out in the Beckwith hallway helped me through some rough days. I know that watching 25 students offer their own unique gifts to the university community and to each other made me feel good. I know that experiencing the care and resolve from Pat, Katherine, and Paige gave me a standard I hope to reach in my professional and personal life. I know that having Kate there for me brought me a profound comfort.

Humanity probably has plenty more centuries ahead of it. Stars and comets and planets are not leaving anytime soon. But we only have this small sliver to work with. So just don't ever forget how dazzling and truly big you all are. Thank you for welcoming me into the community and into your lives. For that I am forever grateful.



Undercover DAs.



The best Reading Day study break ever—ice skating with the gang!

Imprint

by Youngjin (Sam) Kim
Community Health Intern



It is crazy how fast time flies; the year has come to a close. Having the opportunity to complete my community health internship as part of the Beckwith community has been eye opening and enjoyable, and a privilege. The joy that I experienced here cannot be defined by one specific event, but rather by the process of growth through the challenges this internship presented. Working at Beckwith has helped me develop better time-management skills and opened my eyes to the psychosocial aspect of health. From meetings to preparing interview questions, I feel that there are so many resources available to whoever needs them—students, PAs, and interns!

Through the support from the staff, I can see a collective community. As a student, I was able to attend meetings where the staff valued my opinion. Anytime I had a question, Pat, Paige, and Katherine were always there to lend a helping hand. This is a place where people build each other up, sharpening iron with iron. I have been able to connect with people here through the projects on which I have been working. For my case study, I worked with a student with a spinal cord injury. By getting to know him, I have learned how to interact and connect with other students with disabilities. I was able to interview and film students, capturing the psychosocial aspects of their disability and getting a glimpse into their lives. These videos are going to enhance Beckwith's mentoring program. Even helping with the semi-formal enabled me to make connections, which ultimately makes the community closer.

Beckwith is home to a great community and I am very thankful that I got to spend my last semester here. I value becoming more connected with the residents and PAs. I hope these friendships will continue to prosper.



Left: Sam
breakin'!



Right: The
Gatsbys.



Beckwith's Unforgettable Spirit

by Lexi Wirtas
Beckwith and Nugent 2nd floor Resident Advisor

There is an uncommon spirit known only by those who are a part of the Beckwith community. It is unique, it is real, and it is passed on from year to year. It is a spirit that is both dynamic and complex; it is a spirit comprised of friends, family, laughter, and love. It is a spirit of Ubuntu: I am who I am because of who you are.

I have had the opportunity to watch this diverse community change, grow, and strengthen over the years. Each year there are individuals who move into the community and there are others who transition out, but the spirit remains alive.

I firmly believe that everything in life happens for a reason. Each experience, interaction, and relationship not only uniquely shapes us into who we are, but also into who we are meant to be. The connections and relationships that have been made will guide us throughout life and shape future opportunities and experiences.

I am so blessed to have experienced and been touched by this spirit. I have had the opportunity to watch this diverse community change, grow, and strengthen over the years. Each year there are

individuals who move into the community and there are others who transition out, but the spirit remains alive. My time to transition out of the community came when I graduated in May. I am so incredibly thankful for all of the memories that were created along the way. This spirit will forever be an important part of who I am.



Who knew ice skating was so fun?



Commencement 2014.

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