

MASS. SELF-ADVOCATES CLUB RECOGNIZED

by Trevor Meek

BRIGHTON, MA — In June of 2016, Specialized Housing residents and members of the Mass. Self-Advocates Club (M.S.A.C.) Kendrew Caporal of Brookline and Neal Cane of Cambridge accepted awards at the Mass. Advocates Standing Strong Annual Awards Gala for their efforts in championing the rights of the developmentally disabled. Kendrew accepted the Nancy Maynard Leadership Award which, according to the Mass. Advocates Standing Strong (M.A.S.S.),

is “Presented to self-advocates who consistently and effectively use their voice and actions to demonstrate proven leadership skills and an understanding of the M.A.S.S. mission.” Kendrew has been a member of the Mass. Self-Advocates Club in Brighton since 2002 and he is currently the Club’s Treasurer. Neal Cane, the current President of the M.S.A.C., accepted the Self-Advocacy Group Award on behalf of the entire Club. According to the Mass. Advocates Standing Strong, the award is “Presented to groups who have best represented the mission of M.A.S.S. to their communities with creativity, energy, and dedication.” Neal has been a member of the Club since 1986.

When asked which accomplishment they

were most proud of in their time with the M.S.A.C., both men had similar responses. They are most proud of what they (with the support of other advocates from around the state) accomplished on October 1st of 2007. On that day, the Department of Mental Retardation officially changed its name to the Department of Developmental Services. The Mass. Self-Advocates Club has been given a lot of credit for this momentous shift and it is an accomplishment that, according to Kendrew, has given Club members added motivation to advocate on behalf of their peers.

The M.S.A.C. is said to be the first self-advocacy group for the developmentally disabled in the U.S. and was founded in 1959. Club meetings operate much like a city council meeting—minutes are kept, issues are debated, votes are counted, funds are reported and budgets proposed. Meetings are largely led by Club President Neal Cane, and he ensures that everybody’s opinion is considered and their vote counted. Meetings are taken very seriously, yet, Kendrew Caporal says, “It’s important to have a sense of humor. The entire group has a great sense of humor and also great respect for one another.” Besides their weekly meetings, the Club also attends recognition banquets (like the Mass. Advocates Standing Strong Awards Gala last June) and legislative conferences. For the last nineteen years, members of the Club have attended a state wide conference sponsored by the Mass. Advocates Standing Strong which brings together representatives of self-advocacy groups from around the state. In 2016, an impressive gathering of approximately four hundred representatives attended the M.A.S.S. Conference. Members of the Club also frequent the halls of the State House to keep a close eye on legislation and to ensure that their voices are being heard.

There are currently eighteen members of the M.S.A.C. and, according to Neal Cane, they are always on the lookout for prospective members. The Club does very little advertising or promotion, but, Neal says, “We get a lot of our members by way of word of mouth. People hear about us and want to see what we’re all about.” Anybody interested in joining the Mass. Self-Advocates Club is welcome to attend one of their 7:30 pm meetings on Tuesday nights at the Jewish Community Center which is located at 50 Sutherland Avenue in Brighton. Neal says that new members can look forward to “...being part of a group that is very close with one another and always very supportive of each other and the community.” Kendrew Caporal adds, “And don’t forget the pizza parties! Everybody looks forward to the pizza parties.”



Top: M.S.A.C. President Neal Cane (left) holds the M.A.S.S. Self-Advocacy Group Award alongside Treasurer Kendrew Caporal (right). Bottom: An M.S.A.C. meeting in progress.



THE ABLE ACT

by Trevor Meek

After it had breezed through the notoriously partisan US House and Senate, President Barack Obama signed into law the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act on December 19, 2014. The ABLE Act provides an opportunity for Americans with disabilities to open tax advantaged bank accounts which enable them to save money while avoiding the loss of crucial benefits because of Social Security- and Medicaid-related income restrictions. Currently, these income restrictions loom over SSI/Medicaid subscribers. If these income restrictions (a qualifying subscriber cannot have more than \$2,000 in assets) are exceeded, the subscriber risks losing their benefits. ABLE accounts allow account holders to save money while avoiding this risk. Money in an ABLE account will not be assessed in the evaluation of an account holder's financial eligibility for Social Security or Medicaid. Beneficiaries can also use funds from the account to pay for disability expenses as defined within the Act. ABLE accounts are similar to special needs trusts but without the sizable expense trusts require to set up and maintain. In order to qualify for an account an applicant

must prove that their significant disability or blindness became a part of their lives before they were 26 years of age.

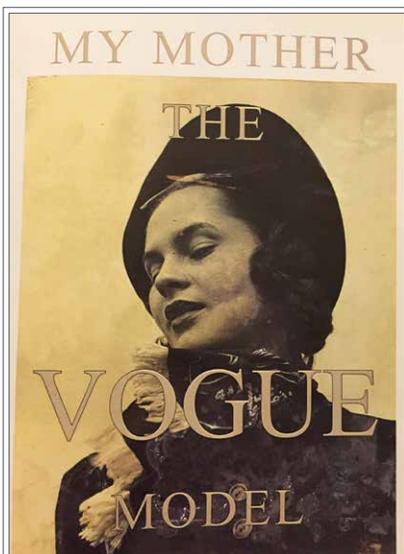
Several states are currently offering ABLE accounts to their residents. Massachusetts was expected to offer ABLE accounts by the end of 2016, yet, due to legislative red tape, the adjusted goal is to offer these accounts by the end of 2017. Maine is currently in the process of investigating the experience other states have so far had with the ABLE program and expects to have a full report with recommendations in the coming months. Legislation passed in 2015, however, allows those residing in states that are not yet offering ABLE accounts (such as Massachusetts and Maine) to open an account in one of the several states where the program has already been established. These states include Rhode Island, Ohio, Florida and Tennessee. Once ABLE accounts are officially available in an out of state beneficiary's home state, those account holders will then be able to transfer funds from their temporary out of state accounts to a permanent account at home.

While ABLE accounts are a tremendous leap forward for the disability rights movement, there are several provisions that applicants should consider. For instance, annual aggregate contributions to an ABLE account

cannot exceed \$14,000 (the federal gift tax limit). This provision has some advocates worried that contributions made to an ABLE account by well intentioned family members may result in overfunding of an account and could therefore cause unforeseen taxation or an abrupt loss of a beneficiary's SSI/Medicaid benefits. Also, there is debate over the definition of qualified disability expenses for which money in an ABLE account can be allocated. According to www.congress.gov, qualified disability expenses are "expenses for education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology and personal support services, health, prevention and wellness, financial management and administrative services, legal fees, and expenses for oversight and monitoring, funeral and burial expenses." Advocates for the ABLE Act fear that it may be difficult for families and beneficiaries who may not be fully aware of the legal terms and conditions of their accounts to ensure that each expense is made within the confines of this definition. Along with these provisions there are several others within the ABLE Act that should be carefully reviewed by anyone interested in opening an account.

The provisions within the ABLE Act have garnered plenty of speculation and inquiry, however, it is widely recognized and agreed upon (as evidenced by the remarkable margin of victory that the ABLE Act achieved in both the US House and Senate) that the measure is a necessary refinement of the laws which support and protect the disabled citizens of our country. It is a program which should be seriously considered by those who depend on SSI or Medicaid and who are trying to set money aside without losing the benefits of such programs.

To learn more about the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, please visit www.ablencr.org



MY MOTHER THE VOGUE MODEL BY MARGERY RICHARDSON HITS SHELVES

BROOKLINE, MA — In September of 2016, Agent X Books published Specialized Housing resident Margery Richardson's first book, *My Mother the Vogue Model*. In the book, Margery chronicles her mother Margaret Stevenson's life with a collection of pictures from the late Ms. Stevenson's modeling career, which began shortly after she moved to New York City at the age of sixteen.

Margery has been an artist at Gateway Arts for twenty years. While she has a clear literary talent, and says that she would like to spend more time writing in the future,

Margery's favorite medium is drawing.

Out of all of the stylish pictures that we see of her mother printed throughout the book, Margery says that her favorite is the one which she selected for the cover (pictured at left). You can buy a copy of *My Mother the Vogue Model* from the Gateway Arts Store located at 62 Harvard Street in Brookline.



Author Margery Richardson (third from left) with friends/fans at her book signing hosted by Gateway Arts



NEWTON RESIDENTS TEAM UP WITH WAYPOINT ADVENTURES

The following article and corresponding pictures are taken from the Waypoint Adventure website (www.waypointadventure.org) with their permission. The article features several residents and staff from Specialized Housing.

BOSTON, MA — Waypoint recently partnered with a group home from Newton for an exciting evening of paddling the Charles River in Cambridge. Residents of this home and its staff have been on the lookout for adventure opportunities; chances to learn and grow and build community. Through a mutual friend, the Waypoint connection was made. Participants took in an illuminated city-scape from a new perspective (with a collective minute of silence too!) and learned about paddling in current, following boat traffic, and working with a partner in a tandem kayak. We asked each participant at the end of the night, “What was your Waypoint?” and “What will be your memory or ‘marker’ that reminds you of learning along life’s journey?” One participant said she’ll remember “experiencing the city in a new way.” Another

participant, surprised at how hard it was for him, learned to “trust [himself].” Thank you to Friends of Magazine Beach for making this site so accessible and easy to use!



Top: Theo Cartier and House Manager Christine Burke enjoying a beautiful view of the Boston skyline.
Center: Jeffrey Kettle gives a thumbs up as he enjoys kayaking with Katie Fortier.

DR. DOOLITTLE VISITS LINCOLN STREET

by Laurie Zallen

Lauren Rose (a.k.a. Dr. Doolittle), a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine candidate at the Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, recently hung out with all of us at Lincoln Street. Lauren shared stories about her adventures in the animal world including hanging out with wallabies in Australia, counting bats in the caves of Vermont and even performing an operation on a brush tail possum. She was very gracious and answered all of our questions. We could have listened to Lauren all night. It was a wonderful visit and she promised to visit us again. We hope that she is able to bring some of her four legged friends with her the next time.



Lauren Rose shares stories of her animal encounters and travels with the residents of Lincoln Street

SHI ANNOUNCEMENTS

Openings and New Developments:

Specialized Housing currently has openings in Arlington and Brookline and is still seeking families interested in the South Portland, Maine development. Also, a new family group has formed to develop a home in the Brookline/Newton area and will begin considering interested families in the near future. Please contact Michael Caballero at mike@specializedhousing.org for more information about these opportunities.

New Residents: Parker Brandstater

New Hires:
Anne Kousoulos, live-in staff
Hannah Schriefer, live-in staff
Ayesha Wilson, relief staff
Aristotle Boslet, relief staff

A LOOK BACK AT 2016

From yard sales in Arlington to David Stagakis's famed holiday lawn decorations on Winchester Street, Specialized Housing residents made the most out of 2016. Residents of the Lincoln Street house hosted their annual art show and, along with other competitors from Specialized Housing, strived for greatness at the Special Olympics. 2016 will forever be remembered for its historic presidential election, and residents from all over went to the polls to support their candidate and wore their "I Voted" stickers with pride. Thierry Cushing of 769 was so proud that he wore his sticker on his nose (pictured top right alongside his house mates). We will always remember 2016, but very much look forward to a happy, healthy and successful 2017!

