

Our Gratitude to You During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Thanks to your extraordinary generosity, SAIL has been able to adjust and respond to the ever-changing needs of seniors and people experiencing disabilities during this time of crisis and uncertainty. We are dedicating our August newsletter to a few of the stories that exemplify the agility, heart, and ingenuity that were put to work because of donors like you. Thank you for inspiring independence throughout Southeast Alaska!

Independent and Safe in a Pandemic

To date, more than 40,000 Americans living in nursing homes have died due to COVID-19. SAIL has responded to a rush of requests from family members and individuals who want to find an alternative to institutionalized care in order to lower their risk and improve their independence. Every individual who wants to move out of a nursing home has unique needs and varying circumstances. But rapidly changing COVID restrictions present a new set of complicated challenges and health concerns.



Michael wanted to live on his own again, but there were huge hurdles in his way. Mental health challenges culminated in his admission into the long term care wing of Petersburg Medical Center. As the hospital prepared for potential COVID cases, they hoped to discharge noncritical patients like

Michael. In addition, Michael's mom was worried about the risks he would face if he remained in the facility. They turned to SAIL for help.

Michael wanted to move to Juneau, where he could find the right mental health support for his success. But travel restrictions and complicated requirements made any move tenuous. Michael needed funding and assistance to find and set up a new apartment, professional in-home help, case management, and multiple medical assessments in place before he could safely be discharged for the move.

All of that had to be organized with new safety considerations in mind. "Every step was made more complicated because of COVID-19. We needed each piece to come together, or the whole plan would fall apart," said SAIL's Aging & Disability Resource Center Coordinator Tracy. Michael wanted nothing more than to live in his own apartment again.

continued on page 3



When the world went online, many who relied on SAIL's outdoor recreation program, ORCA, for regular healthy activities suddenly found themselves at home alone. ORCA leapt into action with socially distanced scavenger hunts, online challenges and weekly Zoom workouts that encouraged peer connection. (Johanna pictured above, during her "Color Challenge" scavenger hunt.) Thanks to careful planning and creativity, ORCA is making plans to bring back limited in-person outings this fall. Check out sailinc.org for more info.

30 years of ADA

A Letter from the Executive Director

The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 26, 1990. One of the most significant civil rights laws our country has ever enacted, this sweeping legislation protects people with disabilities against discrimination in the workplace and ensures equal access to public buildings, spaces and services. Yet with so much to celebrate, we still have far to go.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the many inequities that remain for people experiencing disabilities: medical bias that can result in care rationing at taxed hospitals, students with disabilities inequitably disserved while schooling from home, communities' emergency preparedness plans failing to adequately account for the accommodations needed for the Deaf, blind, those with physical impairments, and so many more. So where do we go from here? First, we need to elevate people with disabilities to serve in leadership and decision making

roles in our communities. How can we expect the diversity of disability to be accounted for when those voices aren't at the table?

Second, accessibility and accommodation should be considered in all aspects of how we navigate the world. When a community improves accessibility, it has unintended benefits to others who may not experience a disability (like curb cuts for the parent pushing a stroller, or closed captioning at public meetings for the elder whose hearing is fading).

To celebrate disability is to acknowledge the inherent dignity in all of us. With your support, your efforts, and your advocacy, our neighbors who experience disabilities will thrive in communities that are accessibly for us all.

- Joan O'Keefe, SAIL Executive Director

Safely at Home, With Family



William is an elder in Kake whose health was rapidly declining. His wife had been providing round-the-clock care for many months and she was feeling worn out. Their daughter sought out SAIL to help find solutions that would allow her dad to remain at home.

The family worked with SAIL staff to pull together the many pieces needed to help William avoid entering a long term nursing facility. If he could qualify for

SAIL's Veteran Directed Program (VOICE), William could hire additional family members to help in the home, and pay for needed medical equipment. The first step was securing a doctor's assessment to enroll him in the program.

That's when COVID restrictions changed everything. Suddenly William's in-person medical exams were canceled and all communications had to be handled remotely. SAIL and SEARHC collaborated to get William the appointments he needed, and pull together the reams of paperwork. "It was probably hundreds of emails, texts and calls, but it was worth it," said Janelle Friday, Independent Living Advocate at SAIL. Janelle helped William hire family members, find a hospital bed and an overnight "sleeper chair" for William's caregivers to use in his bedroom, and managed the purchasing and shipping at a time when many businesses were temporarily closing to the public and medical supplies were scarce.

Today, William continues to live at home and his VOICE benefits are helping him employ his grandchildren and other family members as caregivers.

Finding Safety and Stability During COVID-19



“When I spoke to Jenny at SAIL I immediately felt much safer and stable.”

Like so many others, shutdowns stemming from the coronavirus pandemic forced Lance from full to part time employment. Lance’s paychecks shrunk, and he soon fell behind on his rent and utility bills. In a matter of weeks, Lance was facing eviction.

In addition to his housing crisis, the loss of routine and uncertainty around the looming pandemic increased Lance’s anxiety, and triggered a manic episode. “The stress level I was experiencing was extremely high,” said Lance.

Lance reached out to SAIL for assistance. “When I spoke to Jenny at SAIL I immediately felt much safer and stable.”

In addition to mental health conditions, Lance has a form of lupus that has led to multiple pulmonary embolisms and mild strokes. Jenny told Lance about the Alaska Brain Injury Network (ABIN). ABIN manages a grant program for Alaskans with traumatic and acquired brain injuries who are experiencing financial hardship.

Lance and Jenny gathered paperwork to help qualify him for financial support from ABIN and doggedly kept in touch to ensure the grant request was complete. After many weeks of work, Lance was awarded a grant

which, combined with a small grant from SAIL’s Last Resort Fund, allowed him to pay off his bills and stay in his home. Success!

According to Lance, “Today I am stable and back to work full time. I want you to know how much you’ve helped me. May you all stay safe so you can continue to do the amazing work you do.”

Racial Equity Work at SAIL

Recent calls for social reforms that address institutionalized racism have inspired SAIL’s Board and staff to investigate how our own organization can improve. We know we have a lot of work to do. To start, we are partnering with local leaders to deepen our understanding and explore our own internalized biases, and we will work in the coming months to identify strategies to drive the changes we want to see within SAIL, and through our work with people who experience disabilities. We see this as the continuation of our commitment to making SAIL a more diverse and inclusive agency that we all continue to be proud of.

Independent and Safe in a Pandemic

(...continued from front page) Tracy believed Michael could be successful if he had the right supports, and he deserved an opportunity to try.

Tracy helped Michael apply for a grant, facilitated paperwork to secure his apartment and helped to identify the right team to support Michael once he moved into his own place. “It took a village,” said Tracy, who credits the collaboration with community partners to ensure Michael had what he needed to be successful.

Today, Michael lives in Juneau and talks to his mom every day. She told Tracy “I’ve never heard him so happy, and so proud.”

Summer Work Programs Across Southeast!

When summer tourism and service industry jobs were hard to come by, SAIL's Summer Work Program was there to inspire and motivate young people in Juneau, Sitka and Haines.



Despite COVID-19, Juneau's Youth Employment in the Park (YEP) continued strong for it's fifth year! With support from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, SAIL partnered with the Zach Gordon Youth Center to offer transition-aged youth community-based, hands-on work experiences in the city's parks and trail system. YEP focuses on building each individual's soft and hard skills that can be put into practice in their future work endeavors.



The two crews this year, each made up of six members and a peer mentor each, have been working hard on power washing, repainting, weeding, and picking up trash in Juneau's downtown parks, trail drainage at the Treadwell Historic, Rainforest, and Perseverance trails, and facility improvements at the Eagle Valley Center.

Sitka's inaugural summer work program employed six students and a peer mentor. They completed work with the Alaska State Parks, the US Forest Service, and the Sitka Cycling Club. Students came to work each day with good attitudes and ready to work hard!



In Haines, nine students and two peer mentors completed projects in coordination with the Takshanuk Watershed Council. Work included trail maintenance, garden enhancement and community service chores like hauling and stacking wood for elders in need.

In the words of one participant, **"I'm more confident and now know that I can be a good worker. Plus, I felt proud to bring home a paycheck this summer!"**

Thank you for supporting young people throughout Southeast Alaska and giving them the tools to succeed.

CREATE A LEGACY... FOR INDEPENDENCE

Your values will live on when you make a future gift to SAIL in your will or estate.

Options for planned gifts include naming SAIL as a full or partial beneficiary in your retirement account, or leaving SAIL a specified dollar amount or percentage of an asset in your will.

Planned gifts are invested in the SAIL Legacy Fund, a permanent endowment.

More information at www.sailinc.org or call Sara at (907)314-3074

