

## Your Support Lead Us Through A Year of Uncertainty

March 2021 marks a full year since our lives drastically changed due to the COVID pandemic. Thanks to your support, SAIL was able to shift our services to respond to emerging needs throughout Southeast Alaska. This newsletter details just a few stories of growth, resiliency, and hope made possible by your generosity. Thank you for *Inspiring Personal Independence throughout Southeast Alaska*.

## When Disaster Hit, SAIL Was There Thanks to You



***"SAIL has stood by me all this time, and that is worth an awful lot."***

The storms that impacted Southeast Alaska hit Haines especially hard. Massive landslides, washed-out roads, and flooded homes left dozens of families displaced.

**"It was clear from the start that the road to recovery would be long and complicated,"** said Haines Director Sierra Jimenez. "While relief organizations ensured families had immediate shelter and care, we knew many of the survivors- especially elders and those with disabilities - would need support on their path to recovery."

At 83, Lemmie is a longtime SAIL consumer in Haines, and fiercely independent. She was living in her home on December 2nd when a muddy slurry of flood runoff from a deteriorating roadway started to fill the ground floor of her house. Lemmie was evacuated to a nearby hotel, where she remained for two months. **"We tried to find a suitable solution for Lemmie to move out of the hotel,"** said SAIL

Independent Living Advocate Janine Allen. **"In the end, it was Lemmie's determination that made it happen."** After posting her own notice at the grocery store, Lemmie moved to a temporary rental last month.

Lemmie's home has suffered damage from debris, burst pipes, ice buildup and mold encroaching on the walls. Initial estimates to repair the damage are upwards of \$65,000. Lemmie and SAIL, in coordination with local and state relief programs, are working together to build a path to recovery. It has not been simple.

In order to access disaster relief, **SAIL ensures Lemmie has the information she needs to make her own decisions.** Janine helps Lemmie keep the reams of paperwork organized, and *(continued on page 3)*

# Tireless Advocate & Friend: A Tribute to Birdie



*Birdie (right) & Alexis enjoying the sunshine in Ketchikan.*

SAIL lost a fierce advocate earlier this year. Beloved SAIL employee Charan “Birdie” Bird passed away after sustaining injuries when she was struck by a vehicle while crossing the street. Her passing has left an emptiness, and caused us to reflect on the impact that one person can have on so many.

By day, Birdie was our Ketchikan administrative assistant. Whether answering phones, managing loan closet requests, or handling taxi vouchers, Birdie made every single person she met feel as if they were the most important person in the world.

By night, Birdie led a weekly peer support group for people struggling with behavioral health diagnoses and their families. She had a way of listening and making the person on the other

end know that their story and their life mattered. “Birdie was accepting and welcoming to all.” one friend recalled after her passing.

Birdie did not judge or define a person by their mistakes. **She believed a person could accomplish anything they set their mind to, and offered her own experiences as a guide and inspiration.**

Raised in Ketchikan, Birdie lived with bipolar disorder and other mental health diagnoses for most of her life. Determined to live independently, Birdie managed her health through medication and therapy, and gained strength by giving back to those around her.

Birdie started with the SAIL team as a senior volunteer, joining the staff two years later to captain the front desk. **Birdie’s upbeat attitude and loving acceptance to those she met set the tone for her coworkers.** “Birdie will remain one of the most hopeful, awe-inspiring women I have had the pleasure to know,” said Melissa O’Bryan, SAIL’s Ketchikan Program Director.

Birdie started SAIL’s successful Behavioral Health peer support program, and brightened the meetings with her homemade baked goods every week. When meetings went online, Birdie was there on her iPad to share her experience and wisdom.

**Birdie was a tireless, loving voice throughout SAIL.** While her life may have ended too soon for those of us who knew her, the legacy she leaves behind will live on.

For more information about SAIL’s weekly Peer-to-Peer Behavioral Health Support Group, call:  
1-888-452-7245

**Thank you** to those who donated to SAIL in memory of Birdie:

*June Dahl*

*Janet and John Engle*

*Mark and Kay Kaufer*

*James & Melissa O’Bryan*

*Ardith and Walter Smith*

*Kathleen Yarr*

# Imagination and Patience Builds Independence

When Anthony moved to Juneau to live with family, the transition was challenging. Anthony had aggressive outbursts and periods of unresponsive behavior. **Anthony's sister-in-law Raina was determined that he live a life of more independence and satisfaction.** She signed up Anthony for ORCA, SAIL's adaptive recreation program, in the hopes that the activities and social interactions would be helpful.

Anthony struggled at first. On his first trip to Eaglecrest, an outburst led him



*"I'm on top of the world!"*

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***"I have watched my child go from confused, shy, withdrawn, and angry to being an open minded, happy, adventurous young man!"***

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to shed his parka and burst into the lodge. The staff were concerned for Anthony's safety, and knew they needed to try something different. In coordination with Raina, and Anthony's special education teacher, they came up with a plan and set boundaries for Anthony to participate safely.

When Anthony was ready to try skiing again, staff took advantage of Anthony's imagination, and turned Eaglecrest into the set of "Jaws," encouraging Anthony to slay "sharks" on the course. Anthony immediately started turning and stopping on his own.

**This season Anthony picked up right where he left off.** Together with Anthony's ...continued on page 4

## ***When Disaster Hit (continued from front page)***

... troubleshoots communication barriers when they arise. For instance, the State uses email, and Lemmie doesn't use a computer. "I print all Lemmie's emails and go over them with her, to make sure Lemmie stays informed."

Along with our partners, and a coalition effort to coordinate long term recovery efforts, **SAIL will work to ensure Lemmie and the many families impacted by the disaster have the tools and resources they need to rebuild their lives.**

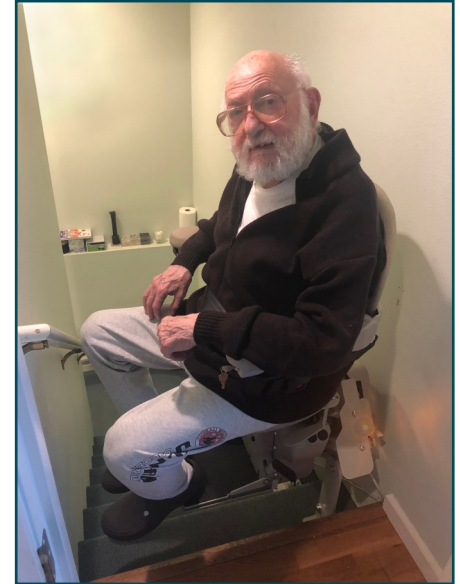
One of those tools is a grant program to help survivors with disaster-related expenses. Administered by SAIL, and funded with an initial \$30,000 grant from Chilkat Valley Community Foundation's Emergency Response Fund, the grant helps to pay the balance of Lemmie's rent that is not being covered by a State benefit. "The grant fund is one way we can say 'yes' and help families get back on their feet," said Sierra.

**This story is far from over. Thanks to your support, SAIL staff will continue our work in Haines to ensure seniors, people with disabilities, and many more have the support they need to work toward recovery.**

## A Veteran's Independence with the Help of Family—And You!

Elliott was recently widowed and living in an assisted living facility far from his family when he decided to move up to Juneau to live with his son Jay.

The family was happy for the opportunity to create their multigenerational household. **As his mobility declined, however, the stairs leading outside the home became a major hurdle for Elliott.** He was slowly losing his connection to life outside the house, and even trips to the doctor were challenging. The family approached SAIL to investigate options for making



*Ingenuity helped Elliott and his family find a solution for him to leave the house safely.*

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*“Collaborating with family and staff was critical in finding the right solution for Elliot to safely age in place.”*

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their home more accessible so Elliott could continue to safely live with them. **Independent Living Advocate Tracy Lee encouraged the family to take a step back and consider Elliott's broader needs.** She introduced them to SAIL's veteran-directed program, VOICE, which helps veterans like Elliott hire their own employees to help with tasks like dressing and personal hygiene. Elliott opted to hire his daughter-in-law Becky and grandson Dakota as two of his assistants.

The question still remained of how Elliott could safely leave the home. Sherri von Wolfe, SAIL's Accessibility Specialist, suggested installing a stair chairlift to help Elliot access the family's garage. **SAIL helped the family apply for grants, and negotiated with a local stair lift supplier to get the right setup in place.**

Today Elliot is once again joining his family on outings and more easily leaving the house for appointments. “Collaborating with family and staff was critical in finding the right solution for Elliot to safely age in place,” said Sherri. “I was grateful for the teamwork and thankful SAIL could help!”

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### *Imagination and Patience (continued from page 4)*

... family, ORCA tapped into SAIL's Last Resort Fund (LRF) so Anthony could receive quality snow gear for the mountain. His skills progressed, and soon Anthony had mastered the highest chairlifts. At the top of the mountain Anthony exclaimed, **“This is awesome! I am on top of the world!”**

According to Raina, “When Anthony joined ORCA, he was an angry and confused young man. Anthony has gained self-confidence, built friendships, and been able to participate in new activities. **I have watched my child go from confused, withdrawn, and angry to being an open minded, happy, adventurous young man!** I attribute a lot of this to the way ORCA is structured.”

Thanks to your support, Anthony, and many others, will continue to gain confidence, independence and joy.