



Shared Living

A Story of Integration, friendship and Living Life

[From visualizing community integration, to living it everyday](#)

By Kate Stark

Pamela Myricks joined the Ohio Valley family as a group home manager of Shadymist in 1980. She has been with the organization through decades of change, operationally as with the growth of OVRS from managing four unit apartment buildings, to group homes and independent apartments to it's current, vast network of homes and host of services. She has also witnessed on a societal level as communities become more welcoming and inclusive of individuals with developmental disabilities

Before coming to OVRS, Pamela worked for the Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disabilities as a Sensory Motor Teacher. While there, she realized how much richer life could be for people with developmental

disabilities if they were more integrated in their communities.

"In the 70s, one of the ways a lot of parents coped with having an adult with a disability living at home, is that they thought of them as their eternal baby. For example there was one woman who would come to work [at the adult activity center] everyday, and she was like 40 years old, but her outfits looked like something you would put on a 3 year old. She'd have Strawberry Shortcake or Mary Poppins printed fabric, and two ponytails with yarn that matches the outfit. You could tell she was so loved, but it makes you wonder, 'what's going to happen to this person once their parents are no longer here?'"

Pamela and her husband Lennell were looking for a new place to live, and one day while browsing the classifieds Pamela instead came across a job posting for a manager of a group home.



Pamela and Lennell Myricks

"I knew instantly," Pamela gleefully explains how quickly things moved; within just two days of seeing the ad she was hired at Shadymist. "My interview was probably 9, 10 in the morning, and [Karen Burr] told me I got the job, and I stayed there talking with her until like 4 in the afternoon! Then I went to pick up my husband and brought him back so he could see the apartment. Karen and I became instant friends right then."

That first year at Shadymist would establish several long-term relationships in Pamela's life, among them, a friendship with Carolyn Pittman, who now lives with Pamela in Clifton. Carolyn was living at Maderia Home that year, when Pamela got a call to fill in for a manager at that location who was sick. "I didn't know anyone there, and Carolyn just sort of started bossing me around even though she really didn't speak much at all at the time. She just sort of shoved

the medication book at me. We became friends then, and so when there was an opening at Shadymist, she moved to Shadymist. And then she moved with me to Burnett and then she moved [to Clifton], so we've been together since 1980."

Barbara Riddle moved in with them temporarily in 2001. She hasn't left yet, but always says "We'll see about next year."

Their home, which has since transitioned from being a group home with four residents to shared living with two, is the perfect location for this artistic and independent bunch. Pamela always wanted to live in Clifton, but she wasn't sure how a group home would be accepted initially. The year prior to them moving in, a lawsuit was brought against a similar home in Hyde Park by neighbors who were not quite welcoming. The group home won in that case, but Pamela was still concerned how the neighbors might take it. "When we first moved in, my husband was out in the yard, and a neighbor introduced himself, and he says, 'I've got teenagers, so if my kids ever make too much noise, just call over and tell them to be quiet if I'm not at home,'" she explains. "So then my husband, he's scared to say it but he gets up his nerve and says 'Well, we're going to have a group home, so the same here.'" It turned out that neighbor was a Special Education professor at UC, another neighbor had her doctorate in Montessori education, and a third taught Special Education classes.

Even beyond the unique perspective of their immediate neighbors, the women have found themselves welcomed by the community and are very much a part of it. Pamela describes it as a sort of network and says it has been especially helpful for Carolyn to have the independence to walk down to Ludlow and visit shop owners almost everyday. "She's sort of shy with someone she's just met, but she really has improved her language skills. For example, she'd see me dressed up-and I'm not normally dressed up around the house- and she used to just say 'Where?' and now she'll say 'Where are you going, Pam?' Part of it is because of her relationship with neighbors and with her coworkers at McDonalds."

Meanwhile, Barb fits right in with Pamela's group of friends who are artists and art lovers; she is also an artist, creating works that blend poetry, painting, and found objects. She works out of their home and at the Visionaries and Voices studio, which is nearby in Northside.



Carolyn, Pamela and Barb on a recent visit to the Cincinnati Art Museum

"I've experienced a lot of jobs, working for the county as a Sensory Motor teacher, and then a lot of jobs within Ohio Valley as a Home Coordinator, as a Development Specialist, as a Training Coordinator, but I think this is the best job for me," say Pamela. "This is, by far, the job that I treasure the most. Being able to be a part of daily life and seeing the growth of daily living skills, community skills, and having joy in life because everyone needs something to look forward to."

One thing the women in this home look forward to is vacations together. They've taken trips as short as to Yellow Springs for the evening, and as long as spending a week in New York City. They've traveled out West and have gone to Washington DC, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, and dozens of places in between.

"The vacations- it's a whole process. We look at [the tour bus] schedule and start talking about what ones we might choose, and we go shopping for the clothing." Pamela explains that when they travel they wear similar clothing, whether its from the same line, made from the same fabric, or is just the same color. It helps identify them if anyone gets separated and is a neat addition to the process of planning the trip. But their planning goes beyond that. "We buy photo albums and we prep for when we get back. We plan when we're going to go to the salon a week or so before we leave. It's something all year round that we talk about and look forward to."

And because they often travel with the tour bus company Croswell, they've expanded their community even further than their neighborhood. It now includes tour guides and other guests they've befriended on multiple trips. "It's very cool that the more trips we go on, the more people we're getting to know. We've become part of that community now too."

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