



Tracy Lehman is a single Mom who works as a manager for Allegany Arc's Day Habilitation Program. She is quick to help a friend in need and is someone employees feel comfortable sharing their hopes and fears with. She also happens to be a Family Care Provider.

Allegany Arc's Family Care Program provides community-based residential housing in certified private homes for individuals with developmental disabilities. By providing the support, guidance and companionship of a family, the Family Care Program fosters a caring and stable home environment for children, adolescents and adults.

Allegany Arc has been providing Family Care since 1996 and Tracy Lehman was one of the leading people to take on that role. At the time, Tracy was married and she and her husband provided respite for Gary "Bear" Farnum. When Gary's Dad took ill, he asked the young couple to please take care of his boy.

Tracy recalled they were the only people Gary had stayed with besides family. He was a natural fit for them and shortly before Gary's Dad passed away, he moved in with Tracy permanently.

Tracy is the epitome of a Family Care Provider. Since Gary moved in with her in 1999, she has faced many challenges and changes. She has moved several times, gave birth to a baby boy in 2005, and is now divorced. Through it all, Gary has stayed with her. He is a grandchild to her parents and a brother to her son Zane as he proudly tells people "Bear is my brother from another Mother."

Tracy said they act just like brothers. They quarrel and carry on but also love and protect each other. Tracy said that the money she earns by providing Family Care is certainly helpful in raising her boys. It is evident however; that what she does is out of love, not for money.

Tracy said that people in the community know Gary and he is embraced by everyone. She sweetly said of Gary, "Once you meet him, you will not forget him. He has a bigger than life personality matched only by a bigger than life heart."

Gary is not treated differently because of his disability. He has chores and knows what he has to do when getting home from work or day program. Tracy said she also loves what having him in their home teaches Zane. Tracy added, "My son is growing up knowing that people with disabilities can do anything people without disabilities can do. It might take Gary longer and it may be done differently but he is completely capable."

Tracy said when she goes to pick up Zane from Boy Scouts, everyone always greets Gary and Zane is proud to have him as a brother. She noted, "In today's world, there is still a stigma attached to people with developmental disabilities. I hope we are fighting that stigma simply by being a family. We may not be what people think of as traditional, but we are a family and my heart beats for these boys."

Tracy recommends someone interested in opening their hearts and homes to become Family Care Providers start with Respite. She said of the obligation, "I cannot just run to the store. I have to get the boys together and bundled up and a five-minute trip might take us 30-minutes." Tracy continued, "It is a lifelong commitment. Gary is every bit part of my family as my son is. And while Zane is going to grow up and go to college, Gary will always be with me. If I move away, when I retire, Gary is always at the forefront of my decision making. When I plan out my future, it is never really mine. It is ours. And I would not have it any other way."

If you are interested in more becoming a Family Care Provider or would like more information, call John Dolan, Allegany Arc's Family Care Liaison at (585) 593-5067 or john.dolan@alleganyarc.org.

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