

Generations Crossing: Providing Day Care Across the Generations

In 2003, the lives of Harrisonburg residents Marie and Gary Dickenson changed in a split second when Gary, age 50, experienced a life-threatening blockage in his brain caused by a cyst.

The incident happened early one morning while Gary was walking alone. A neighbor happened to witness his collapse and, within minutes, he was in the RMH emergency department. Gary was transported to UVA, where neurosurgeons immediately operated to open a blocked cerebral ventricle. (Cerebral ventricles are filled with cerebrospinal fluid, which bathes and cushions the brain and spinal cord.)

Despite quick action, Gary had suffered brain damage. Following surgery and two months in the hospital, he needed rehabilitation to relearn everyday tasks, from sitting to walking and talking. Gradually, he improved.

Within one week, he was walking. Next, his speech returned. However, after several weeks, it was clear that Gary's short-term memory was not returning.

The Dickensons faced a challenge. Marie needed to return to her work as materials manager at RMH, but Gary needed full-time assistance. In-home care options proved too costly. When adult day care was recommended, Marie admits her first thought was of "an old folk's home" and put off the idea. But as her return to work became imminent, the Dickensons visited Generations Crossing, a multigenerational day care center in Harrisonburg. What they found was entirely different from what Marie had imagined in an adult day care center. After spending an afternoon with participants and staff, Gary made the decision to enroll full-time.

In 2001, the ElderAlliance of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, including RMH and other partners, recognized the need for adult day care services in the community. At the same time, there was demand for additional childcare. From these two needs emerged a shared concept, intergenerational care, and the vision of Generations Crossing blossomed.

In 2002, Generations Crossing opened as a licensed adult day care facility, operating in leased space in Park View Mennonite Church. Within two years, the center provided care for over 80 adult participants, filling an obvious need in the community.

Early on, Generations Crossing relied on partnerships with other organizations to fulfill the goal of intergenerational engagement. Between the Eastern Mennonite University Early Learning Center,

the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Daycare Center and summer camps hosted by the center, Generations Crossing Executive Director Laurie Deavers says the community presented many opportunities.

However, to achieve the comprehensive vision of intergenerational care, Generations Crossing needed a home of its own. In 2005, the Generations Crossing Board of Directors approved "Building for the Ages," a capital campaign to raise funds for a new adult and child daycare facility.

The community rallied behind the effort, contributing over \$900,000 toward the new facility. In November 2008, a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrated the opening of the new Generations Crossing Intergenerational Center, a 11,000-square-foot facility located on the corner of Massanetta Springs Road and Taylor Spring Lane.

The center was designed to serve 30 full-time adult participants and upwards of 100 children ranging from infants to school age.

And on January 5, 2009, Generations Crossing opened its doors to its first full-time child care participants.

"We've worked toward this for seven years, and to see it finally come to fruition truly has been inspirational," says Judith Trumbo, director, Transition Planning at RMH, and 2008 Generations Crossing Board Chair. "The vision of Generations Crossing is something that fits very much into RMH's mission in the community."

Deavers described the moment as one the adult participants had been eagerly anticipating. "There were moments when they literally could not wait," she says. "Now that the children are here, it has been amazing to see the connections form."

Six years after Gary's enrollment, Generations Crossing is essential to the Dickensons. Marie continues to work full time, knowing that Gary receives outstanding care and enjoyment at the center.

"I don't know what I'd do without them," she says. "When I'm at work, I honestly don't worry. That's how much I've come to depend on them and how much I know he's going to be OK."

Marie says one fulfilling aspect of Gary's time at Generations Crossing is interacting with the children. "His face lights up when I ask about them," she says. "When life threw us a curve ball, Generations Crossing hit a home run!"

For more information about Generations Crossing, contact Laurie Deavers, Executive Director, at 434-4901.



Gary and Marie Dickenson are thankful for the care that Gary receives at Generations Crossing following the brain damage and short-term memory loss he suffered because of a brain blockage in 2003.