

*Family,
Community and
the
Holidays*

HOME FOR THE HOLLY HOLIDAYS

SUBMITTED BY VOR

Virginia (“Ginger”) Massa is home at Holly Center, a state-operated residential home for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Located in Salisbury, Maryland on the State’s idyllic eastern shore, Holly offers a variety of services to individuals with significant disabilities. As a federally regulated Medicaid Intermediate Care Facility for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF/IID), Holly Center is well-equipped to provide high quality, specialized care and compassionate supports uniquely tailored to individuals with profound care needs, including I/DD, medical complexities, physical disabilities, and behavioral challenges.

Before her admission to Holly Center, Ginger did not always feel so at home. For many years, Ginger lived in a smaller home that struggled to meet her profound needs. Her stepmother and legal guardian, Mary Reese, however, never gave up. After a difficult eight year journey, Ginger was finally, truly home at Holly Center.

Families face similar situations across the country. It is a monumental challenge, and sometimes impossibility, for people with profound disabilities to secure specialized

care in facility-based settings. In Ginger’s case, it took the generosity of one of the top law firms in the country, a savvy stepmother, and a national advocacy organization (www.vor.net) to make the placement happen.

Ginger’s good fortune is not lost on Reese. As a national advocate, she knows all too well that Ginger’s eight year struggle is one shared by thousands of individuals across the country. She recognizes that her

A RARE VICTORY IS A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR ONE FAMILY AND HOPE FOR OTHERS.

job as an advocate is not done.

“Our elation at Ginger being home at Holly Center is diminished by the knowledge that thousands of others are waiting for services without the consistent and comprehensive care that is so necessary for their well-being,” remarked Reese. “These fragile individuals are not at home

nor integrated in their communities. Ginger is very fortunate.”

Looking Back & Ahead

Ginger’s long journey, while certainly peppered with significant hurdles along the way, is not without success that will benefit others.

One early legal victory was the 2006 decision by the Maryland Court of Special Appeals ruling which stated that Ginger was denied due process when Maryland’s Secretary of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene refused to even hear her request for admission to Holly Center.

At issue was a statute controlling admissions for Medicaid Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICFs/IID) in Maryland. The controlling statute was found unconstitutional because it only provided for a hearing when ICF/IID admission was approved. No such hearing right was offered when ICF/IID admission was denied. Ginger’s fight changed state law which now requires appeal hearings in each case.

“Families still face an uphill battle, but at least now there must be a fair hearing,” says Reese. “In our case, it reset the clock



DEDICATED TO SPEAK OUT: Ginger at Holly Center with Mary Reese (right) and her late step-sister, Amy (left).

and gave us hope; before it was nothing more than the Director's whim, letterhead and signature."

Reese credits VOR, a national non-profit advocacy organization for recognizing that a victory for Ginger would benefit Ginger's peers throughout Maryland.

"VOR convinced the law firm Sidley Austin, LLP, that Ginger's cause was a cause worth taking," said Reese. "Thanks to VOR, we had access to outstanding legal representation and advocacy to carry this cause forward." Sidley Austin attorneys provided pro bono representation to Ginger and Mary for more than six years.

Ginger: At Home at Holly

Ginger will soon be celebrating her second year anniversary at Holly Center. She and her family look forward to the festivities in her Holly and Salisbury communities.

"I've been telling everyone it felt like Ginger and I were in the film *The Wizard of Oz*," says Reese. "Remember how the film begins in black and white and then at the yellow brick road everything turns to Technicolor? That's the best way I know to describe what a dramatic change Ginger has experienced moving from her inade-

quate and, at times, unsafe, placement to her home at Holly."

Reese, a long-time advocate for people with disabilities, is more determined than ever to pay her good fortune forward. She now serves on the VOR Board of Directors and is a member of the Holly Center Citizens Advisory Committee, appointed by Governor upon recommendation of Secretary of Health & Mental Hygiene.

MARY REESE IS MORE DETERMINED THAN EVER TO PAY HER GOOD FORTUNE FORWARD.

"We will not now abandon those who are not as fortunate," says Reese. "Our greatest hope is that Ginger's long journey paves the way for others in Maryland and even across the country. We are dedicated to speak out for each person with special needs finding and being allowed access to the most appropriate level of care and services."•

ABOUT VOR:



VOR is a national non-profit membership organization advocating for high quality care and human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Learn more at www.vor.net.

ABOUT HOLLY CENTER:



Holly Center is a State residential and training center that serves people with developmental disabilities primarily from the Eastern Shore Region. Through a planning process governed by the principles of individual choice and empowerment, Holly Center staff provides 24-hour residential care, treatment and supports intended to assist each individual in reaching their maximum potential. Services are provided in an environment that is safe and healthy.

A variety of services are provided including vocational, educational, medical, dental, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech language, audiology, psychological, psychiatric, neurological, psychiatry, dietary, recreational activities, respiratory and 24-hour nursing. These services are tailored to the unique needs of each individual by a team of professionals representing many specialties. Learn more at <http://www.hollycenter.org>