

Innovative Easter Seal Programs Help the Disabled

BY RHODA WEISS

When William Rayber and Anna Krawczyk received the keys to their own condominiums in November 1999, they unlocked the door to independence. Rayber and Krawczyk are the first individuals with developmental disabilities to independently purchase their own homes through Easter Seals Home Select.

The Easter Seals Home Select Program in Southern California puts home ownership in reach for many low-income people with disabilities and their families. The program provides home buyer education and training and helps individuals locate financing. Furthermore, Easter Seals provides assistance as participants locate homes for sale and evaluates the homes to ensure they meet requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

For 29-year-old Rayber, who is legally blind, has cerebral palsy, and has a mental disability, the move to his own one-bedroom condo is his first taste of independent living. For the past six years he has lived in a group home for people with disabilities. Even though people told him he would never make it on his own, their doubts only strengthened his desire to live independently. "I tell people who don't believe in me that lots of individuals who use wheelchairs live on their own," Rayber says.

Fifty-year-old Krawczyk, who also has a disability, lived in an apartment for three years with the help of Easter Seals Independent Living Program, which provides specific support and training so that adults with disabilities can live on their own. Krawczyk never expected the price of home ownership and independence to be affordable, but her monthly mortgage payments are \$70 less than her rent was. In May 1999, Easter Seals presented Krawczyk the opportunity to purchase a condo. She jumped at the chance to become a home owner. "I love living by myself," Krawczyk says. "No one sets rules for me, and I have nothing tying me down. I'm free to do whatever



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I want, and I make my own decisions."

Easter Seals' commitment to these new home owners' independence didn't end when their escrows closed. They receive ongoing assistance and support up to 24 hours a day, seven days a week from the Easter Seals Supportive Living and Independent Living Programs, according to President Mark Whitley. "These programs also teach the participants necessary skills to live independently, such as budgeting, safety, cooking, cleaning, and accessing community resources," he explains.

COMMUNITY EVENTS HELP THE DISABLED

Easter Seals of Southern California offers more than 100 innovative, community-based programs in Southern California that give people with disabilities the skills and support they need to reach new heights in equality, dignity, and independence. These include adult day care; after-school programs; behavior management training; brain injury programs; outdoor camps for children, adults, and their families; and child development centers for preschoolers. Easter Seals of Southern California communicates its programs through the media, brochures, Web sites, and community activities.

One of these activities is the annual 24-Hour Relay, which in 1999 raised a record-breaking \$877,000. More than 3,000 people attended the event, in which 100 corporate teams of 24 members each walked, ran, or wheeled around the track at California State University-Long Beach for 24 hours to raise money to support Easter Seals.

Vons, a Southern California supermarket chain, also sponsors other events throughout the year. One electronic fund-raising program, "eScrip," gives Easter Seals supporters a hassle-free way to make donations by shopping at local Vons and Pavilions, a sister chain. Vons and Pavilions donate up to 4 percent of total purchases made by shoppers who register for eScrip and choose Easter Seals as the benefiting organization. □