# MY IMPACT STORY

as told by Larry Acton (father of Cathy Acton, Wavecrest Core Member)

It never seems to end! …. or so we thought. It had become an unsatisfying and never-ending cycle of group home changes for Cathy since successfully finishing high school at her special Santa Barbara boarding school.

Sally (with a master’s degree in Special Ed.) and I had thought we knew what to look for and what to inquire about each time there was a need to search for another group home for Cathy. Each of these homes appeared immaculate during our visits. The owner/’manager’ of each home had all the right answers to our questions about the daily routines that would take place. But …

After a few years or months, she needed to move from each home for any one of a variety of reasons:

1. An ill-conceived and poorly managed independent living program that set up absurd barriers to possible success.
2. A home that chose to change from housing level 2 to level 3 residents.
3. A house that was sold to a buyer who chose not to have a group home
4. A home in which one staff member made off with resident’s money reserves and another staff member with a boyfriend who would arrive and beat her periodically, plus a third staff person who stayed up to watch TV into the early morning hours and frequently sleep during the weekend days when she was on duty. This home was owned and operated by an absentee psychology professor.
5. A home whose married owner/operators laid out all the activities that they provided for the special needs residents (including library visits, which really excited Cathy). Within two weeks they had left to open a second group home and brought in immigrant staff (some who couldn’t speak clear English). In the three years Cathy lived there they were not taken even once to the library. One immigrant staff person would prepare dinner and then disappear into her bedroom (with door closed) to watch her native TV station and the resident women had to answer anyone who came to the door.
6. The one home that appeared best was owned and staffed by a senior-aged Caribbean woman who took a serious interest in her challenged residents and would sit and converse with them each day when they returned from their day programs. But she decided to close her home due to her perceived harassment from state licensing after a single failure to document a missed medication (she actually reported the incident herself).

After our decision to remove Cathy from her last of the locations (the 5th situation detailed above), we moved her back to our home while we tried to decide what to do next. Nearly three years later during a chance meeting with Karen Carr while Cathy was performing with her musical group at an organization fundraiser. Karen spoke to me about Abraham House and the general L’Arche program. She urged us to apply for Cathy and mentioned that they would be moving from the 3 core- member-home in Fullerton to a larger home in Orange. Frankly, my Sally and I had some trepidations and concerns that it might just be like all the other group homes. However, we were impressed with the concept of the ecumenical Christian setting. Cathy liked the idea, so we applied and she was accepted.

She has been a permanent fixture in Abraham House for the past 10 years! The program has not been without a few shortcomings, but without doubt, it has been the very best group home situation that we have ever found. The program is an active one with lots of spiritual support, opportunities to travel and meet/form relationships with other L’Arche members, a great community support group from several churches, and the opportunity to live and interact “like family” with other core members in addition to “brothers and sisters” who don’t experience cognitive limitations (the assistants). No other home could have provided the range of grief support to Cathy when her mother passed away two years ago.

In this setting, Cathy has her own room (privacy!) and is treated with dignity, like any other human being. This wasn’t the case in all but one of the other group homes. She knows that with most problems, she can count on assistance.

**At last, Cathy is happy! … and so am I.**