

The newsletter of The Council on Quality and Leadership
Partners in Excellence; Leadership for the Journey

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The Jessamine Place - at the Heart of Community



Fitzgerald, Ben Hill County is located in the heart of South Georgia and has a population of approximately 18,000. The Jessamine Place is located in the heart of downtown Fitzgerald in an historic home originally built as a hotel. The Jessamine Place currently supports 115 people to live, work and participate in the community.

Services in Ben Hill County were facility-based until 1996. As a facility-based program, the organization served approximately 60 people. Under the direction of then Director, Philip Jay, the facility was closed, the name changed to The Jessamine Place, and services became community-based. At or about the same time, The Jessamine Place opted to secede from the Community Service Board (CSB) and go under the governance of the Ben Hill County Board of Health. This change created diversity in service delivery for the organization. The Jessamine Place now supported people in a more “total” way; unlike the facility-based program that primarily concentrated on job skill

development. The Jessamine Place assumed the residential services for the county, which had been under the CSB. A tremendous growth occurred in day services and personal support. More people were supported to work typical jobs in the community.

Community life for people of the organization began to change. Staff were encouraged to participate and assume leadership roles in the community. Partnerships with community organizations blossomed. Opportunities opened for networking and social capital building. People First began and now people members of Jessamine Place have served in state-level positions with advocacy organizations.

This mission continued under the new directorship of The Jessamine Place. In 2003, Helen Johnson as Director continued the building of bridges with the community. She believes and works under the philosophy of "Look to make a better community for all citizens and the people with disabilities will be included naturally."

Today, The Jessamine Place is a much-respected and recognized part of the community. It is seen as a primary contributor and experiences reciprocity from other community organizations and businesses. The Jessamine Place is currently partnering with Family Connections and other community organizations to collect and analyze data and information on key areas of the community impacting quality of life for all citizens. Areas include, but are not limited to, housing, transportation, employment and education. Focus groups have been formed, data collectors identified, as well as persons to analyze the information. Several people of The Jessamine Place serve on these committees/focus groups. Surveys are being developed and will be distributed by the local utility companies. Results are expected to be amazing and life-changing for the community.

"While it's easy to reflect on the impact The Jessamine Place has on our community considering the number of people they support, it's more important to look at each person one by one. Over the past eight years, we have employed two people from The Jessamine Place and it has been an enriching experience for our business and our employees. Giving people an opportunity

to perform at their best is part of our social responsibility. Quality of life in Ben Hill County would be greatly diminished — for all of us — without the extraordinary support provided by The Jessamine Place.”

Tim Anderson, Editor & Publisher

The Herald-Leader

Fitzgerald, Georgia

“Ben Hill County recognizes The Jessamine Place as a vital part of our community and we look forward to a continued partnership.”

Larry Davis

Chairman of Ben Hill County Commissioners

“From its inception in 1972, the City of Fitzgerald has partnered with The Jessamine Place to enhance the quality of life and social status of its citizens with developmental disabilities, through meaningful inclusion in our community. Whether the need is related to bringing institutionalized individuals home, providing contractual jobs or sustained employment, insuring affordable housing, or welcoming their inclusion in recreational activities, this partnership has resulted in a community wide recognition of the contribution of people who had heretofore been excluded. Today one would be hard pressed to find many community settings in which individuals served by The Jessamine Place are not meaningfully included.

“As Mayor and one who has been intimately involved as one of its governing board members over this same period, I count The Jessamine Place as a remarkable community success. Just as our success in local government depends on our ability to partner with the private sector and leverage capital and capabilities to achieve positive outcomes; The Jessamine Place has partnered with former clients and the community at large to produce pride, good citizenship, and productive input into society based on capabilities as opposed to disabilities.

“Their accreditation through CQL comes as no surprise to me. I can think of no better model for a community organization serving the need for which it was founded in a fiscally and morally responsible manner than The Jessamine Place. It has not only given voice to its constituents, but then listened when

they spoke, and opened the doors so that we might hear as well.”

Gerald H. Thompson

Mayor of Fitzgerald

“Partnerships for essential services to communities are critical in assuring people that individual and collective human need is being met. The Jessamine Place provides such services in an exemplary manner to the Ben Hill County area. I have been exceptionally impressed by the dedication and commitment of the staff and the enthusiasm of the people they support to be productive citizens of our community. The people of Fitzgerald recognize The Jessamine Place to be a valuable commodity here in our home town and county. It is difficult to consign to words the utter pride evidenced in the faces of those people who are gainfully employed or involved in giving back to our community in some way. I cannot imagine the void in our community should The Jessamine Place cease to exist.”

Dr. John R. Key

Superintendent

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