

# MORE's Work Has Created a Vital Link To Community

By Linda McIntosh

If MORE were a ship and Executive Director Susie Davies the captain, the log would reflect the myriad of decisions and major strides made by the captain and crew.

A private, nonprofit entity in Placerville, MORE (Mother Lode Rehabilitation Enterprises) provides services for adults with developmental disabilities. For more than 40 years, it has sailed across a vast ocean of time to get to where it is today. Of course, it wasn't always "sailing," sometimes it was plowing through rough seas, as through belt-tightening recessions.

Still, MORE is a hub of activity, providing a series of classes, job training, jobs, and help in almost every way for disabled adults. Everyone there—from staff to those who use MORE's services to the executive director—emanates a camaraderie that says "we're all in this together."

Even local businesses and community groups have partnered with MORE, providing a flow of help, expertise and jobs. Davies and her crew are building on this to create a network of partnerships that have far-reaching benefits for both commerce and MORE.

The recipients of MORE's services are "clients." During an interview for this article, Davies stressed that each developmentally disabled person at MORE is an "individual," and treated as such.

"Serving this population is a privilege and all of us think that



Susie Davies, Executive Director

photo by Linda McIntosh

they have made us better people," Davies says.

A client's individuality, challenges, and gratefulness, Davies notes, are life-changing for teachers and coaches at MORE.

Davies, as captain of her vessel, knows the intricacies and every facet of MORE's unique services. She's been there for 30 years — three-quarters of MORE's life.

She started as program director and in 2000 became executive director. She understands the disabilities and the person challenged by the disability. Her dream has been to have local residents and businesses embrace the capabilities of MORE's clients and know them on an individual basis.

"Our clients are no different from other people. Their dreams and desires are no different. They want to be seen as people first rather than for their disability. They want to be included and productive," she says.

Temple Grandin, an internationally recognized veterinary scientist, is a good example of a productive life. "She has created all kinds of systems for treating animals with more kindness," Davies notes.

Grandin was diagnosed with autism at the age of 3 in 1950, but had supportive family, teachers, and services from an early age. It wasn't easy but she finally started thriving, later earning her bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's in animal science, and a doctoral degree in animal science in 1989. She became well known as an animal welfare advocate and a leader in autism advocacy. Among her top essays about animal welfare is "Animals Are Not Things" ([www.grandin.com](http://www.grandin.com)). Today, she is highly sought after as a speaker on these topics.

Might this be an exception?

"Some of our most brilliant artists and scientists had autism," Davies points out.

I mentioned to Davies that I'd seen a documentary video of a family and their severely autistic daughter who, by a certain age, had made astounding progress. When she was young she had behavioral issues that finally stopped when she could communicate, in this case through a computer.

Davies explains that there is a reason for the behavior that formerly wasn't understood. Experts learned that the reasons can be biological — pain, medication interaction, the need for sensory stimulation. It can be social — boredom, seeking social interaction, the need for an element of control — any of which can cause a person to react in a way others find odd.

At MORE, staff listens to

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all their clients and offers support in many ways. There are diverse skills-building programs in a goal-setting environment. Clients have many options in planning their day, setting their goals, and choosing activities. Classes in computers, in art, sewing, crafts, life skills, and works skills are some of the choices.

"They are vulnerable," says Davies of her autism clients. "They are very accepting, kind, trusting, helpful, and want to please everyone. They never forget anything, especially a kindness. So when you show them a kindness, they remember it for a lifetime," she adds.

Davies likes to aim the spotlight on MORE's network: the staff, the Board, the clients themselves (of whom a couple sit on the Board), the parents, and the community.

"We are in our 40th year of serving people. MORE is unique and, as a private non-profit, it is run by a board of directors who really 'own' the organization," Davies says. MORE's goal has been to fully include people with disabilities. "Full inclusion means acceptance as contributing citizens by all members of the community," Davies explains.

MORE got its start in 1969 when a handful of parents of adults with developmental disabilities got together, compared notes, and sought solutions. By 1973, with a staff of four, MORE began serving eight clients. By 1978, accreditation was granted for one year. The next year, it achieved a 3-year accreditation, which has been the case for almost 35 years.

In the late '70s, job placement and adult education were added. MORE kept growing to serve the needs, adding more staff, expanding programs.



*MORE work crew repairs motors.*

"We are a community that doesn't look down on our clients; we accept them. All of the staff has to be good role models. Staff knows not to get petty about small matters," she says.

## What is a Developmental Disability?

A developmental disability is a general term that describes lifelong disabilities affecting everyday activities. The disabilities are attributable to mental or physical impairments, typically diagnosed prior to age 18. The impairments are in the areas of physical, learning, language, or behavior. The disabilities have many different known causes — social, physical, environmental — but not all causes are known.

Clients at MORE make up a cross-section of the medical diagnoses that run from the autism spectrum disorders to Down syndrome to Cerebral Palsy. These are the more common developmental disabilities plus ADHD, intellectual disabilities, and vision impairment.

Pursuing deeper data, we can learn that the four main types of developmental disorders are nervous system disabilities, sensory-related disabilities, metabolic disabilities and degenerative disorders.

Before hiring, MORE has the applicant "check us out for one to five days," Davies says. This allows both sides to see if the relationship is a good fit. "They don't come for the pay," she says, "it's not a huge sum since it's a nonprofit. Some have come from big-paying jobs and are willing to take less pay to make a difference."

Davies says that the teachers and coaches are committed and the staff is dedicated. "They are people who know they can make a difference, and the rewards are so huge," she says smiling.

Davies adds that developmentally disabled adults don't want to be viewed as different. "Their dreams and desires are no different from yours and mine. I'd like members of the community to know that everything they do is done here by MORE (in applying life skills and job skills). Many here earn a paycheck... and the self esteem that comes with that is huge," she adds.

Besides earning money, Davies notes, "Clients love to dance and love music. Our next goal is to someday have a band."

MORE's Art & Wine Festival is the major fundraiser of the year. "And it's really fun," Davies says.

"We invite anyone who wants to come for a tour to just call and arrange a time. It will change your life, and make you appreciate life a little more. If you're looking for a small way to make a difference, come visit MORE," Davies says.

*See the sidebars and photos for more information on MORE clients, including the job skills they offer to the community. Davies and her staff can be reached at 530-622-4848, susie.davies@morerehab.org, and through www.moreRehab.org.*

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## MORE at Work & Play



Top left, Wes bales paper. Above, Trout Unlimited teaches fly casting. Right, Grounds Maintenance crew's garden at MORE. Below, Denise helps out at Snowline Hospice; below left, Jessica at Snowline Hospice.



### Hire MORE And Everyone Benefits *Job Coaches Lend Support to Employee and Employer*

MORE likes to be productive and is appealing to the community for more work. With a staff of 82, about 140 of the 200 disabled clients currently work in the community or at MORE. Job coaches train employees and are the connection between the employer and the client. The coach, paid by MORE, will teach the specific tasks for a job.

"MORE helps with interviews and does trainings," says Debbie Emmett. She is a Rehabilitation assistant and was the guide for *Around Here's* tour of MORE. "We save employers money, and they get tax breaks," adds Emmett.

Today, MORE's clients work at Raley's/Bel Air, Safeway, Taco Bell, McDonalds, Red Hawk Casino, and other local businesses, but MORE has a need for more jobs.

Piecemeal work can be done for an employer right at MORE. Workers excel at assembly, mailing, collating, packaging, shipping, paper recycling, confidential shredding, and other step-by-step jobs. MORE work crews do a variety of jobs such as grounds keeping and janitorial work. The payroll costs, training, quality control, and supervision are covered by MORE.

Susie Davies, executive director, says that the workers are pre-screened, dependable and have great attendance records. Many have been employed at the same job for 10-20 years.

Call for a free estimate or a brochure. Also, see workers in action by taking a tour at the MORE center, 399 Placerville Dr., in Placerville. More information at 530-622-4848 and [www.moreRehab.org](http://www.moreRehab.org)



*Kasey replaces a mower blade at MORE.*