

the trip of a lifetime: the guys group

By Annette Pinder

Three years ago, Alison Smith, People Inc. life quality coach coordinator, thought about how to more effectively meet the needs of young adult men at People Inc., especially those transitioning from their family homes into their communities.

Nick and Chris knew the greatest challenges for these guys is developing life and social communication skills, or to put it simply – becoming independent and making friends. Nick, a former behavior specialist and Chris, community habitation and residential department manager at People, Inc., helped develop what is now known as The Guys Group.

The Guys Group is a social program for young men with developmental disabilities created by People Inc.'s Life Quality Coaching Department. Its goal is to help young men ages 18-30 discover and nurture their passions, build lasting friendships, and develop skills to help them live and work more independently. The group is involved in many activities, including taking trips together. While camping in the Adirondacks, one of the guys was concerned about not being able to see the stars in the sky clearly, suggesting that it might be better out west. It got everyone thinking. planning, and fundraising. In all, they raised \$12,000 over 10 months through the generous support of individuals and business members.

And so, on May 30 of this year, Nick and Chris, now both life coaches and trip leaders, set off with Jon Caldwell, Nick Feeterman, Aaron Hanson and Eric Johnson, members of Guys Group, for the trip of a lifetime. Together, they traveled 6,000 miles in an RV, visiting the Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Hollywood and more. The trip also included visits to other developmental communities, including Bethesda Lutheran Communities in Fort Collins, Colorado; Opportunity Village in Las Vegas, Nevada; TERI, Inc. in Oceanside, California; New Horizons in San Fernando Valley, California; and Dale Rogers Training Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. They shared their coaching philosophy and encouraged the groups to start similar programs to The Guys Group.

There were so many life-changing aspects to the adventure as the guys learned how to plan and budget, learned new organizational skills, how to own and use

a smart-phone and bankcard. Hanson, 22, and originally from California, got to stop and visit his grandmother. He said his favorite part of the trip was hanging out with friends, who he says have become his second family.



Upon returning home and getting out of the RV, the group received a warm welcome from friends, family and People Inc. staff members. The trip will be documented on film and combined with footage of the guys preparing for the journey. To help fund the documentary's production, donations may be made at their GoFundMe People Inc. Crossing Borders trip page at www.gofundme.com/crossingborderswny. Photos from their trip are posted on Facebook at www.facebook.com/crossingborderswny.

People Inc. is a not-for-profit health and human services agency providing programs and services to more than 12,000 people with special needs, their families and seniors throughout Western New York. Since 1971, People Inc. has assisted individuals to achieve greater degrees of independence and productivity. Learn more at www.people-inc.org.

As appeared in the July 2015 issue of Buffalo Healthy Living.