

Monthly Access Dances Bring in 100+ Adults with Disabilities

The value of socialization and friendship is no surprise. Engaging with new people, creating friendships, interacting... it's all part of how we learn, grow, and enrich our lives. This becomes especially true for our consumers, and other adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These individuals often do not have the same amount of social opportunities, nor events that cater to their unique needs.

As a result, Better Community Living is proud to host the community's monthly Access Dances. The dances take place monthly, and have proven to be truly successful in bringing these persons together, and adding quality to their lives.

Starting in the early 90s, Access Dances have been hosted in the Greater New Bedford Community for nearly 25 years. As of July, this program has now merged with Better Community Living as its primary host.

One person who sees the true value of these dances in action is Joanne Rego, who has been working the dances every single month since they began.

Looking back to 1977, Joanne says, "I've always worked in this field. A lot of these people have become like family and friends. It's not like a relationship with a client. You become very close with people and you recognize that there is a need." Joanne has been running the Access Dances since the very beginning.

"There certainly aren't a lot of opportunities to socialize in the community, not like this...," she says. "We have some that come every single month... never miss a dance. I would say close

to 50% never miss a dance, but then most others come pretty regularly, every 2-3 months.”

When asked some of the things she sees and loves most, Joanne said, “Watching people get comfortable, watching them sing and dance, seeing wheelchairs on the dance floor...” She even said that many stay for karaoke at the end of the night. “It’s fun to see them slowly get the courage to go up there and sing.”

Typically 100-125 people attend the Access Dances every single month. Joanne says there are new people at every dance, plus a strong attendance provided via a half dozen other agencies, such as the Nemasket Group, SAIL, Lifestream, MOLife, Crystal Springs, Fall River agencies, and numerous others.

These dances help those adults, who often have less opportunity for socialization, to meet new people and develop friendships. Joanne notes that some consumers when they first attend are, “profoundly disabled.” She says, “Their social skills aren’t good. They’re just quietly looking around... Like this one guy in particular. At first, he had a hard time, but then he walked in and he was so comfortable. He was literally coming in hopping like a bunny, just so happy to be there!”

Even better, the Access Dances provide meaningful relationship building and lasting friendships. “It’s sort of an adult atmosphere where many people connect. They might find romantic interests, meet someone from another program. It’s opening their social circle.”

“While there are a lot of dancing events in the city, I just don’t know where people would go. This is an opportunity to have a social event in a public building, in the community, open to the building, and it’s catered to their advantage, those who are there.”

Access Dances take place on the 2nd Friday of every month, from 7:00pm – 10:00pm. They are held at the VFW Poirier Post located on the corner of Ashley Boulevard and Appleton Street.

Access Dances are open to BCL consumers, members and groups from other agencies, and they are open to the general public. Admission is \$10.00 which includes a snack and free soda all evening. BCL consumers host the Access Dances, therefore, admission is waived. Music is provided by DJ Rockin' Rick – Richard Brennan.