



*This year we will be highlighting some special people and organizations who are making a difference in the lives of those with disabilities and their supportive families. We hope you make use of these connections as it is our hope that they will link our Special Needs Community in a more personal and supportive way.*

## a whole new life

If you lived in Texas on the 1950's it is likely you didn't have much contact with people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Like the rest of the United States, people born with disabilities often didn't live very long and if they did, the only option for most was an Institution. In 1953, Ed and Marge Bridges founded **Marbridge** in an effort to create safe residential care for their son Jim, and other adults with cognitive disabilities. From the beginning, Marbridge charted a dramatically different course compared to the institutions of the day. The first established community, The Ranch, offered training based on the philosophy that adults with developmental disabilities can learn skills that enable them to become contributing members of the community. Gifts of land in the 1980s expanded the campus to include Mabee Village (now known simply as The Village), a semi-independent community, and The Villa Skilled Nursing Center to broaden the scope of residents that Marbridge could serve. Today, more than 250 adult residents live and work on the Marbridge campus where adults with intellectual disabilities are given unparalleled opportunities to learn, experience, and achieve a whole new life.

Today Marbridge is a non-profit residential community that offers transitional and lifetime care to adults with a wide range of cognitive abilities and – through compassion and faith – provides them opportunities to learn, experience, and achieve a whole new life. At Marbridge three communities connect to create one vibrant campus. Marbridge is nestled on over 200 acres, just 13 miles south of downtown Austin, Texas. Marbridge provides a distinct alternative to group homes for adults with intellectual disabilities, offering a full spectrum of services tailored to individual needs and abilities. Each of our three communities – The Ranch, The Village, & The Villa – provide a different level of care, support, and guidance.

The Village at Marbridge is a neighborhood of 15 cottages nestled along a tree-lined street that provides semi-independent living for developmentally disabled adults. A community center provides a place to gather for meals and special events or leisure time. The Village provides safe, caring environment that includes vocational training, education, socialization and counseling. Many Village residents hold jobs in the Austin community.

A tree-lined boulevard greets visitors as they enter the Ranch campus, where we provide assisted living for adults who require a more structured and supervised day. Daily training and activities may include horticultural therapy, arts and crafts, sports, music, computer work, functional myriad of social opportunities available in Austin, with 24-hour awake staffing and care.

Residents with significant medical care needs can still enjoy a full and active life. Villa residents participate in many events and activities on the Marbridge campus. Likewise, many Ranch and Village residents regularly visit the Villa campus to see friends and enjoy special events found only at the Villa. The Villa provides skilled nursing care to Marbridge residents as well as to patients from the southwest Austin area.

Marbridge has long been an industry leader and recently hosted the 7th Annual CoAct Leadership Symposium, a national executive symposium to discuss best care practices, industry challenges, and build relationships to better care for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These Symposiums are very unique and are a favorite for so many who attend annually. Casa de Amma recommends you visit <https://www.marbridge.org> and find out more about this wonderful organization that makes a huge difference in the lives of so many!

## don't get fooled!

*by Aaron Vorell / Executive Director, Casa de Amma*

One of the most harmful tendencies when interacting with people is falling into simplistic and stereotypical beliefs about their behavior and who they are. Whether it's a support worker, employer or even family member those who interact with adults with disabilities can tend to give too simplistic of views of behavior, resulting in inaccurate myths about motivations and abilities. At Casa de Amma we often discuss eight common myths we may fall prey to in our interactions with those we support, and how we can successfully counteract these harmful stereotypes. Let me share one of the most common myths with you along with some insights on how to change our focus on this subject.

Sometimes we can be fooled into believing that aspects of a disability are more related to issues of personal character. An example would be when a resident has challenges with initiation and rigidity and its mistakenly labeled as "laziness." The way we see behaviors and their root cause is critical. If we see it as an issue, at least in part, of initiation and rigidity we tend to not bring judgement and realize it's part of our role to support them through the resulting challenges. But if we see the person as "lazy" we tend to judge them and offer less patience and support.

### MYTH

I know they have a disability but they seem so capable, I think they are just being difficult and attention seeking.

All too often those with less obvious disabilities are prone to more judgement and less understanding because we think their challenges are more of a personal choice rather than a product of complex disability challenges and personality. None of us would think a person who walked slowly due a limp caused by Cerebral Palsy is "trying to be slow and make me late" – but how often do we think a person with other challenges such as rigidity or poor social skills are "just trying to get attention" or are "spoiled."

I am not sure exactly how or when this happened, but for many support professionals "seeking attention" by consumers/residents has become as heinous as someone being physically aggressive, stealing or false accusations. Even worse than the aforementioned, support staff can feel "seeking attention" is a personal assault on their time and energy. At times there needs to be boundaries, support and limits places on staff's time, and if a consumer/resident is struggling with repetitive complaints or poor boundaries, there is a need to address this and not allow their misplaced efforts at attention to inordinately monopolize staff's effectiveness. That being said, this myth tends to view those who "take up more than their fair share of our time" as purposefully disruptive and subversive.

For the benefit of all those we interact with who have unique challenges we need to make a mutual agreement to not believe this myth and rush to character judgments. All of us have unique needs and desires and all of us need a measure of emotional support and care. This should not surprise us if we work toward being person-centered. In my experience, people with disabilities or not, seek attention primarily for one reason – because they need the attention! Instead of us working against this proactive effort to meet these needs, what if we viewed this as the simplest and most meaningful way we could help? A squeaky wheel squeaks because it needs grease, not because it's trying to get more attention than the other wheels! We all need attention, so when the opportunity arises let's meet this important need with a large amount of compassion and kindness coupled with a lesser awareness of appropriate limits. In doing so, we will find that our supports and programs are more like the kind of place we would want to call home. That's the perspective we would want others to view us with and it's one we owe to those we support and provide services to!