

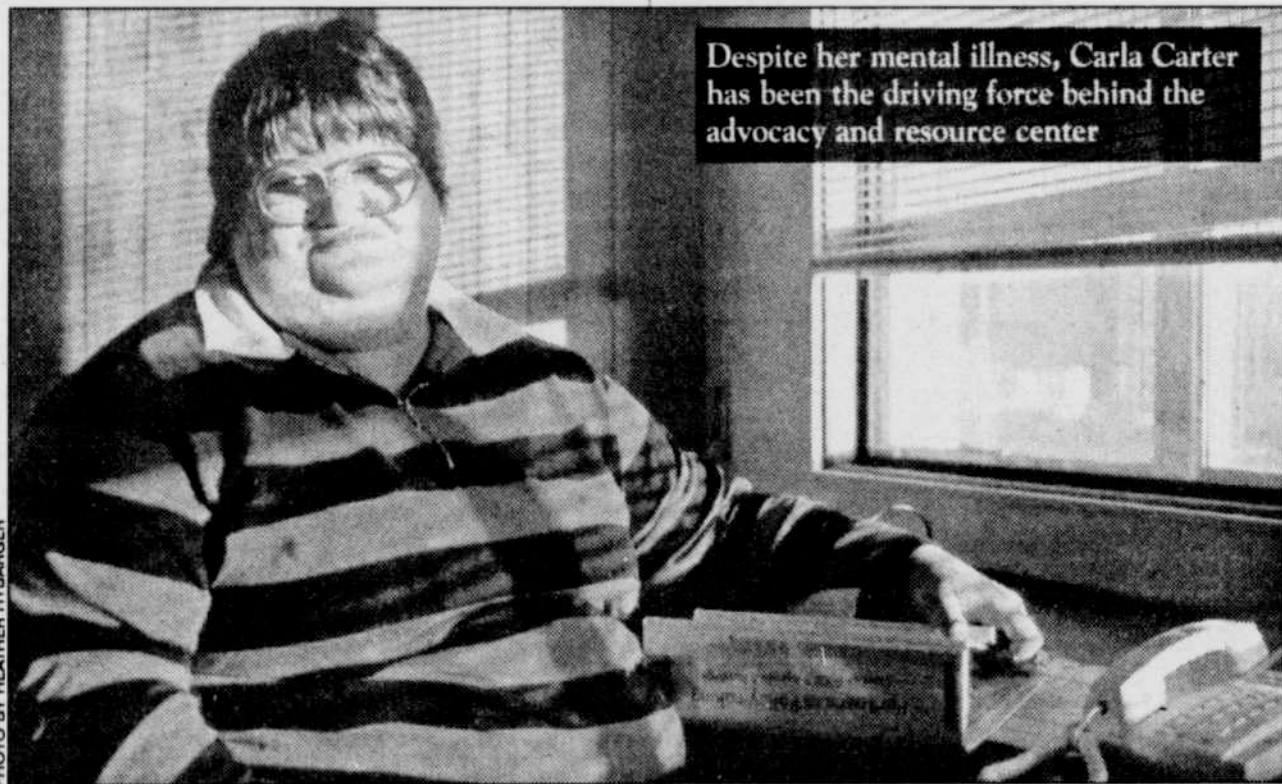
NORTHWEST news

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM HER FRIENDS

Center will assist disabled, mentally ill and queer communities in Corvallis by Heather Hybarger

Carla Carter always has felt she could do more. The 36-year-old aligns herself with many causes in the Corvallis area. She volunteers with the Democratic Party as well as AFTER 8, a political advocacy and educational organization serving Linn and Benton counties. She has cerebral palsy, is mentally ill and identifies as bisexual, so she feels connected to a lot of issues. After winning a \$6,000 grant from the

Plan members with the collaboration of mental health departments. In addition, the alliance has a provider panel of about 75 contracted behavioral health therapists and 11 hospitals to ensure clients receive the most clinically appropriate services. The grant money comes from a fund the alliance has set up for use by consumers or organizations benefiting Oregon Health Plan members in need of mental health services. "I will give her technical assistance in the use of the grant money because there are govern-



Accountable Behavioral Health Alliance, Carter is realizing her dream of doing more by starting an advocacy center. It will focus on the rights of the developmentally disabled, mentally ill and sexual minorities communities. "I see injustice," Carter says simply. "I see kids picking on people, see it in the housing where they discriminate, I see it in budget cuts and the closing of hospitals." The facility will be known as Carter's Advocacy and Resource Center. When it opens in May, she will have a referral service in place and will use her organization to provide visibility, information and a little muscle for the issues she feels passionately about. "In the last five years the media has had a different take on gay and lesbian issues," she says. "I think the same thing needs to happen with the other groups." Carter hopes to correct misinformation and provide other social, advisory and policymaking organizations with representatives from her communities. The center also will be home to social outlets for developmentally disabled, mentally ill, gay and lesbian people in the area. To do all this Carter has the support of her board of directors, volunteers and the Accountable Behavioral Health Alliance. Although her focus seems broad, an agency spokesman says the union makes sense. "By bridging different groups that are traditionally underrepresented, she has economized the system," says Cory VanAlstine, consumer affairs specialist. "It is advanced in that she is multidimensionally looking at these issues." The alliance is an intergovernmental organization formed by Benton, Crook, Deschutes, Jefferson and Lincoln counties. Its purpose is to manage the behavioral health care needs of Oregon Health

mental rules she has to follow," VanAlstine says. "We are hands-off, though, and we try to ensure the success of her business by helping her when she asks for it." In fact, everyone who has worked with Carter on this project is quick to say she is the driving force, the organizer and the brains of the center. "If you look at Carla's exterior you could jump to some conclusions," board member Julie Williams says. "Her brain is sharp as a whip. The cool thing about Carla is that she wants to do advocacy from the inside." Carter has encountered problems with the system firsthand. Her experience in a group home ended with her leaving the facility with no notice. Carter says the assigned caseworker was never there for the residents and didn't seem to care about what happened to them. "Carla gets just enough money [from the government] to just make it, buying her meds and living in her apartment," Williams says. "She's trying to take care of her people, and she's one of the people that could use a little help." Carter doesn't seem to mind offering herself as an educational tool for others. "I wouldn't know how that population lives if I didn't know Carla," Williams says. "I think Carla is one heck of a role model." **JH**


CARTER'S ADVOCACY AND RESOURCE CENTER is located in Suite 102 of the Bowlby Building, 310 N.W. Fifth St., and can be reached by calling 541-754-4254 or e-mailing cmc@peak.org. To get it off the ground, donations are requested of money, time, advertising, office furniture and equipment as well as books on human rights.

HEATHER HYBARGER is a mild-mannered PR person by day and a Cosmic Bowling fanatic by night.

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