

## Profile of John and Aaron

By Saabira Razac and Barbara Baer Pillay



John Michael Down at a NABIS picnic in 1989 with his sister, Karen.

John Michael Down has been a most welcome volunteer every Friday afternoon at NABIS for well over 10 years. He arrives with Aaron, his community service worker, around 2 pm and promptly checks on the status of the coffee in the office. With that out of the way, John and Aaron get to work: shredding confidential papers, stamping envelopes, folding brochures, really just about anything goes. Once finished, the crib board comes out and John beats Aaron, most of the time, or at least that is how John tells it.

In August, NABIS' summer assistant, Saabira Razac, spent a Friday afternoon with John and Aaron interviewing them and she recorded the following:

### Before the interview:

John and Aaron seem to share a very positive relationship. Despite the fact that John is dependent on Aaron for many basic needs, due to his lapses in memory, Aaron doesn't treat him like a child. He gives him space to do things for himself but is standing in arm's reach in case the task becomes too overwhelming for John. From my first encounter with John, I realized that he is a wonderful person. Even though he has a significant brain injury, he is full of life and seems to be content. Is it the home atmosphere that he lives in presently? The setting seems to allow John to live like an adult, but with boundaries to keep him safe. From just meeting Aaron, you can understand why he chooses to be a caregiver [aide]. His warm and jolly personality spills onto everyone around him. He seems patient and giving and this says a lot about his character, for a young and vibrant person to give his life to helping others in this way.

### The Interview

John lives in the Southwood Group Home where he has his own individual room; his own private space. John's brain injury is from a motorbike accident he had as a young man in his early 20's. The injury resulted in him losing his short term memory (even though Aaron has worked with John on a daily basis for ten years, John does not always remember Aaron's name) as well as the ability to walk and take care of himself. John shares the group home with three other men who all have varying degrees of disability.

### Atmosphere:

Very bachelor like style living. "Client run home," relaxed, with variability and choices. The home provides structured living for its occupants. There is a structure to their day, e.g. waking up at a certain time, having breakfast, doing familiar things, for instance, food, games, and movies. The staff does most of the cleaning, but if they make a mess they are responsible for cleaning it up. They do have certain simple responsibilities, e.g. they have to get their own utensils, make their bed; John is responsible for telling staff that he needs his laundry to be done.

### Are there disagreements?

Yes, all the time but they tend to not be very heated or last for very long. They disagree and bicker but after an hour or so things are good again. John gets along with everyone. About 16 to 18 yrs ago, John was a very angry person. He would swear and fight about the littlest of things and be very difficult to deal with, however, over time, John has learned to deal with his temper when arguments get out of hand by simply going up to his room and calming down.

### A little about Aaron:

He has been working at this house for about 10 years now. He has seen one client leave and one new person admitted to the house. Since the age of about 10 or 11 he wanted to help those with disabilities and has since lived out his dream.

### Why?

In grade 4, Aaron met a boy in the special needs class at his grade school and



Aaron and John Michael playing cribbage at NABIS