



e-Beat

**April
2003**

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Dear Friend,

One summer, when the job I had kept me less than busy, I got in the habit of reading the dictionary for an hour or so each day. Besides vastly improving my vocabulary, reading the actual definitions of words taught me how meanings shift over time as society and our usage of them changes.

April, which is National Volunteer Month, reminds me of those dictionary days. Thousands of people have joined e-Buddies as volunteers, defined by the dictionary as “A person who performs or offers to perform a service voluntarily.” As they develop their e-mail friendships, these same volunteers evolve into something more – friends. Webster’s says a friend is, “A person whom one knows, likes, and trusts.”

On behalf of all of us at Best Buddies, thank you for becoming a friend to a person with an intellectual disability.

Best,

Lisa Derx

The e-Beat is published online monthly at www.ebuddies.org.
We welcome your contributions.
Please send them to eBuddiesComments@bestbuddies.org.



Ask Emerson

All of your e-Buddies questions answered here!

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The only way to have a friend is to be one.” In the spirit of those inspiring words, Ask Emerson is a feature designed to help you be the best friend you can be. Each month, we will select a question or two for responses. Send your questions to eBuddiesComments@bestbuddies.org.

Dear Emerson,

I love volunteering for e-Buddies, and would like to get others involved. How can I do that?

Signed,

Irma in Indiana

Dear Irma,

Volunteering for e-Buddies is a great way to make a difference, and make a new friend! I'm sure you know a lot of other people who would enjoy having an e-Buddy. Spreading the word about e-Buddies is simple. Just tell your friends, family, and anyone else what you like about e-Buddies. Explain how the program works, and don't forget to tell them how they can sign up on our website, www.ebuddies.org!

Signing off,

Emerson

Conversation Starters

Springtime is here for many of us, and it's about time! That means no more freezing cold and no more piles of snow to shovel (at least we hope so). It always feels good to hang up the heavy clothes for another year. The days are getting longer and the sun is getting warmer, and we can all appreciate the change in the weather, even those of us that live where it is summer all year round.



The coming of spring can mean a lot of different things to different people. For some of us, it's a time for some good old spring-cleaning. For others, it is a chance to get back outside to be active playing sports or exercising. And for all you sports fans out there, it's playoffs time for basketball and hockey, and the baseball season is just getting underway.

What does springtime mean to you and your e-buddy?

You could ask:

What is your favorite season of the year? Did you get any snow this winter? How is the weather where you are? Do you have a favorite springtime activity? What are you going to do when the weather gets warmer? What is your favorite outdoor activity? Do you play sports, or do you prefer to watch them on TV? Are you going to do any spring-cleaning this year?

Have you had a great conversation with your e-Buddy about something? Have some ideas for questions that get the talk going? Send you ideas for Conversation Starters to Bill Maurer at BillMaurer@bestbuddies.org

Online with...



e-Buddies is excellent! Just ask **Kris Ratekin, Activity Coordinator for Concho Valley MHMR**, an agency in San Angelo, Texas that is not associated with a Best Buddies chapter. In this interview, she gives insight on how easy it is for your home or agency to get people signed up and signed on. Thanks to Ashley Vaughan from Best Buddies Texas for this interview.

e-Beat: Why did you think e-Buddies would be a good program for your consumers?

Kris: We have several high-level consumers that we knew would be interested. This was another way to offer increased socialization, which is one of our focuses. We also thought it would help our consumers with their reading and writing skills, as well as give them increased computer knowledge and experience.

e-Beat: How did you introduce the idea to your consumers?

Kris: I asked the managers to help form a list of who might be interested and appropriate for the program. Then I approached the individuals to give an explanation and find out if they wanted to be involved. Once I explained that it would be like having a pen pal, they really liked the idea.

e-Beat: What steps did you take to get them involved in e-Buddies?

Kris: One of the only concerns we had with the program was making sure our consumers would be protected, so first I conducted several Internet Safety classes. I explained things like pop-up banners and the importance of not giving out any personal information. Then we went to the *Yahoo!* website and I assisted them in creating their own free e-mail accounts. Then we just went to www.ebuddies.org and completed the form.

e-Beat: In what ways have you helped your consumers participate?

Kris: A few need verbal prompts. For example, instead of just writing, "I had fun on Friday night," we encourage them to elaborate and share what they did and why they liked it. About half need help with typing. Most of them can type the words to write what they want to say, but a few have trouble with the idea of the space bar and just need a little editing. All of the participants have had a lot of improvement, though, in both their typing and their letter writing.

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Online with... continued

e-Beat: Did your agency already have a computer available to your consumers?

Kris: Yes, there are 7 computers in our Adult Basic Education classroom.

E-Beat: Did they have Internet access ?

Kris: Yes

e-Beat: Were many of them using the Internet before?

Kris: No, only one had some limited knowledge.

e-Beat: How many of your clients signed up?

Kris: There are 13 so far, but there are a few more that are thinking about it. But, it's not for everybody. A few don't like computers and weren't interested in the year commitment.

e-Beat: How is the program going now?

Kris: It's a huge success. The consumers are still excited, and constantly wanting to come check their emails to see if they have a letter yet.

e-Beat: Is there any other way e-Buddies has impacted your consumers?

Kris: Definitely! They realized that they have a lot of friends out there, and that there are other people just like them. They really like the message boards. One man got into a discussion on cerebral palsy on one and it really cheered him up. Now he's working on learning how to type. It's also a great outlet for those who are more comfortable not talking face to face. Everyone is just really excited about it, and it gives them something to look forward to. It's made them more enthusiastic about work and school again. They come to class because they know afterward they can check their e-mail.

e-Beat: What do the other staff members think of the program?

Kris: The management and my staff are both really excited about it. It's great to provide more than just work opportunities to our consumers.

e-Beat: Do you have any other suggestions for those looking to get their people involved?

Kris: Once you have the support and the resources, just be selective and get a good group to start with. Make sure it's their decision and that it's something they want to do. Be careful, and really explain the commitment. Also, keep good notes and stay organized because it will grow fast.



Best Buddies

Volunteer Appreciation

By Lauren Taintor,

e-Buddies Program Manager, Pennsylvania

“Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth”-Mohammed Ali. This April we celebrate Volunteer Appreciation Month and give thanks to those who realize the importance of giving back to the community and helping others by volunteering. Without our wonderful and dedicated volunteers, Best Buddies would not be what or where we are today. This month, we are giving some e-Buddies the chance to express their gratitude for the volunteers who are such an important part of our program. We asked several participants in the program, “What does your e-Buddy mean to you and why do you appreciate him/her?”

Dan Thompson, e-Buddy from West Virginia:

“My e-Buddy means the world to me as I have found someone who likes me for whom I am and does not look at my disabilities but looks at me as a person just like them and that makes me feel special. I appreciate them because my e-Buddy likes to talk to me about anything and I feel I can talk to them as well about anything and that's so cool. I enjoy getting on line each and everyday and to check out my e-mail whether here or at my library to see what they want to talk to me about or I to them. It's so cool and I appreciate my e-Buddy so much, as my buddy feels they can talk to me and I to them about lots of stuff.”

Robert Plante, e-Buddy from New Hampshire:

“I have been in the e-Buddies Program for 4 Yrs in July 2003.

We e-mail each other 2 times a week if possible. I hope that I will have him for years more he is a wonderful e-buddy to me. Also we talk about lots of sports like golf and baseball also basketball, and his son loves playing sports. He is a wonderful e-buddy and has been really great to me.”

Joy Braun, e-Buddy from Pennsylvania:

“My e-Buddy really means a lot to me because they are always there for you when you need them. I appreciate them because they are really good listeners and they know the right things to say.”

Joshua Handler, e-Buddy from New Jersey:

“My e-Buddy means a lot to me. I look forward to emailing my buddy once a week. Without e-Buddies I would be bored and lonely. I also wouldn't be as interested in email as I am now. e-Buddies is special because it gave me something I never had.”

A million thanks this month and always to the volunteers who are such a vital part of Best Buddies! Hats off to you!

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