

Putting the 'Recovery' in the Recovery Act

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Casey Ketchum, Liberty Place Executive Director Ann Geiger, and Hailey outside Golden Gardens in Whitehall, Montana

It's easy to get overwhelmed by facts and figures when looking at the scope of how the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act impacted our nation. But if you dig down past the spreadsheets and pie charts, you'll find 23-year-old Casey Ketchum.

Born with cerebral palsy in Miles City, Montana, Casey adapted to his challenges, graduated from high school, spent seven years working at a local farm and ranch store, and was attending classes at Miles Community College when his seizures took a turn for the worse.

His condition forced him to quit both work and school, and live under the care of his mother – a difficult strain on his family that he sought to change. He was put on a waiting list for a room at Liberty Place in Whitehall, Montana. Liberty Place provides rehabilitation and assisted living for patients with traumatic brain injuries and conditions like Casey's. Unfortunately, Liberty Place was full.

Opening their original 12-room facility in 2003, Liberty Place was looking to expand their operations and open a new building that could provide intermediate transitional care for patients who didn't need full-time supervision, but were still unable to live on their own. A property that was once a nursing home was for sale, and Ann Geiger, Executive Director of Liberty Place, came to USDA Rural Development to help finance the purchase.

"It wouldn't have happened without the Recovery Act funds from Rural Development," said Geiger. A direct loan from USDA Rural Development's Community Facilities Program provided the necessary funding to purchase the old Golden Gardens property and rehabilitate it to meet their needs.

Casey was at the top of the waiting list and in January, 2010 became the first person to move in to the new facility. Not long after he moved in, he found his companion Hailey at the humane society. She's a cowdog turned house dog who adopted Casey and acts as a friend and protector. She's rarely far from his side, especially after he's had another seizure episode.

Casey has made some great strides since arriving at Liberty Place. A rodeo clown in high school, he staged a comeback during Whitehall's Frontier Days this summer and was an instant hit with the audience. He's also able to help out doing maintenance around the property. "Casey's a great example of why we'd like to put together a work program," said Geiger. "He's got the skill and the desire to work, and we hope to make that a possibility for him and other patients in the near future."

Outgoing and friendly, Casey smiled broadly when asked about being able to move to Liberty Place. "I like it here," he said. "The people that work here know what they're doing and can give me the help I need, and it provides some relief to my mother."

The opening of Liberty Place's new facility with a loan from the Recovery Act reopened an empty structure in a small town, and brought new, permanent jobs for care workers at Liberty Place. It also gave Casey and his housemates a real chance at a recovery of their own.