One of our long-time residential program clients is 76-year-old Nick, a lifelong West Haven resident who once was featured on the cover of the phone book for Special Olympics, see picture, below. In fact, Nick was known by some around the city as the “Mayor of West Haven!”

Nick has been a client in our residential program since its founding in 1984, and his situation is an excellent example of how our continuum of programs has evolved as adults with disabilities have “aged in place.”

It is a phenomenon that has been recognized for several decades – people with disabilities, like the general population at-large, are living longer lives due to tremendous health and medical advancements.

So, as adults like Nick live into their 70s and older so has the focus and scope of the Community House’s program services evolved.

In his early years with us, Nick was a fixture who loved to walk along the streets of West Haven, down to the beach, and to the parks. He loved to play bocce with the various people who also played on the public courts, and he even worked small jobs for pocket money.

Marie Watson, the Community House’s director of disability services, noted that Nick was among the first residents at the Elm Street group home, also known as a CLA (Community Living Arrangement). These homes vary in size from three or more residents, and the Community House provides 24/7 staff support in each CLA.

Once Nick gained the skills necessary for less supervision, he moved into an apartment with a roommate. When the opportunity presented, Nick and his team thought it was a wonderful opportunity for him to live on his own.

After Nick’s roommate moved on and as he needed increased Community House support, Nick and his team decided it was best for him to move back into the Elm Street group home.

Despite being in the more structured living situation, Nick was still capable of having unsupervised time in the community, which was not the case with most group home residents at the time.

The years began to take its toll on Nick’s health. As the 1990s gave way to the new century, his medical condition declined to the point where he needed 24-hour supervision where he needed 24-hour supervision.

Nick also enjoyed the company of his “agency family,” too, dressing up for Halloween and being the “life of the party,” and taking “his girl” – another one of our female residents – to the agency’s annual semi-formal gathering each March.

“Nick is one of our oldest clients,” Watson said. And it’s important to understand that “once you become part of the Community House residential program family, we strive to meet your needs throughout your life – whatever your individual circumstances are – or may become.”

Watson noted that there are several delicate issues that come to play as adults with disabilities continue to age, specifically concerning “quality of life” and how it pertains to “end of life” issues.

In the summer of 2012, the agency renovated the Elm Street group home to create a first floor bedroom for Nick, who had been living on the second floor.

This bedroom met Nick’s acute ambulatory needs, as well as provide him a safe living environment enabling him to exit quickly from the first floor, if needed.

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“Maybe the greatest challenge now is to find a way to keep independence while also committing ourselves to the ties that bind people, families, and ultimately societies together.”

~ Jane O’Reilly

As Watson noted, “Nick is family, part of our family,” and family members take care of each other.

Nick and his siblings.

Nick in red, in this 1995 Phone Book cover.

Nick and friend at Halloween.