Champions of Change: altering perceptions by living and sharing

By Monica Pettengill Jerkins, Resource Developer, Aroostook County Action Program, Inc.

Change is an interesting concept. It excites some, frightens others. Change can be big or small, slow or fast, life altering or barely noticeable. In some instances, change happens on a personal level and nobody really notices but the individual experiencing it. In other instances, change takes place on a much larger scale – a company undergoing a restructuring; a city recovering from a disaster; a society trying to keep up with technological advances. Whether you spend your life pursuing change, or it is thrust upon you, change happens. You can run from change, you can hide from change, but change happens. Change is part of life.

So when we at Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP) were thinking about what to call this series, we talked a lot about change and what it means – to our customers, to their families, to our elected officials, to the community. While we truly believe in the important work we do, rather than featuring that work specifically, this series is meant to give a voice to people in Aroostook County who “Champion Change” – mostly in their own lives, but also in their community. Our hope is that by sharing real stories of people we’ve come to know through our “community action” work, that readers will experience some amount of change within themselves. How that change manifests is subject to a great deal of personal interpretation and application, but in the very least, we hope these stories will surprise you and inspire you in the same way they have us.

In the upcoming weeks and months, Champions of Change will appear as an occasional column and will feature stories of people who defy stereotypes. Our hope for this series is that the stories we share may change the way we think about our neighbors, and may inspire us to think twice before assuming we know all there is to know about an individual’s situation. We want to encourage conversations in the community that we sometimes avoid because the reality is uncomfortable. We want to talk about real life and the things that happen that are sometimes out of our control. Through this series, you’ll meet
people facing life-altering medical conditions, people who have been displaced by natural forces, people who struggle to live on a fixed income, people who overcome challenges to pursue their dreams, and people from all walks of life whose circumstances make them relatable. We’ll talk about difficult subjects like poverty and prosperity, substance use, mental health, loneliness, starting over, and through this, our “Champions of Change,” who bravely share their stories with you, the readers, will inspire positive change in all of us.

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Aroostook County Action Program administers more than 40 programs in the community that help people meet their basic needs and that offer support, education and encouragement. For information, visit our website at acap-me.org or call our office at (207) 764-3271.