

How Best Buddies Founder Plans to Revamp His Company

By Jill SieraCki | November 24, 2015 | [Culture](#)

Best Buddies International Founder and Chairman Anthony Shriver hopes a proposed group-living facility and this month's gala move the organization closer to going out of business.



Anthony K. Shriver speaking at the Best Buddies Challenge: Hyannis Port on May 29, 2015.

While the national unemployment rate hovers around five to seven percent, that number is closer to 85 percent for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). But that's one statistic Best Buddies International is aiming to change. "We really feel [employment] is the last great frontier for our population and where we need improvement," founder and chairman Anthony K. Shriver says of Best Buddies, which hosts its annual Miami gala on November 20. "We have a competitive white-collar-jobs program and are working hard to develop internship programs in high schools for [people with IDD]."

The organization, which celebrated its 25th anniversary last year, sponsors practices to help “Buddies” find employment, encourages companies to hire people with IDD, and hosts friendship and mentoring programs as well as leadership training. Best Buddies operates programs at 2,000 schools globally, affecting more than 900,000 people with and without IDD; the philanthropy’s work with schools will also be spotlighted at the Miami gala. “I’m with a lot of our student volunteers, and I think young people are desperately looking for something bigger, more important than the dollar,” says Shriver. “People with intellectual disabilities can center your life in a really profound way and teach you an enormous amount about yourself, teach you about patience, compassion, and the joys of daily life.”

That idea is inspiring Best Buddies’s latest development: Sarge’s Place. The organization’s first-ever housing project, named for Shriver’s father, Sargent Shriver, is to be built in Miami Beach in collaboration with St. Patrick’s Church. “It’s got opportunities for people to volunteer, sort of replicating a lot of the principles and values that I grew up with in my house,” says Shriver, whose mom, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founded the Special Olympics. “We hope that Sarge’s Place will be a first step for us in creating opportunities for unique, special housing that’s faith-based and supportive and a loving environment for both people with intellectual disabilities and non-disabled people.”

This month, the community can support Best Buddies through the upcoming gala, which kicks off with the Best Buddies Challenge, a 100k bike ride, and culminates with the White Mass the day after. “Everything we do we have the Buddies participate and show their skill sets, whether it’s at a 100-mile ride, or a gala, or a reading at the White Mass,” says Shriver. “We want people to understand that this population is there, they’re capable, they want to feel loved and counted just like you and I do, and when you include them, you feel so much better.” Best Buddies’ Miami gala takes place November 20; visit bestbuddies.org for details

Photography by Laurence L. Levin/best buddies