



Co-Founder Jackie Berns and husband Harry

Jackie Berns

In 1966, the director of casework at the Noble School, Jacqueline Berns, was approached by two of her staff, Sherry Kay Gore and Beverly Farkas. Bev had two children with disabilities. In only a few months, Jackie found herself at the helm of a new organization named Damar, after Beverly's children, David and Martha.

"I was, for my sins, duly elected as the first board president and had no clue where we were headed," shares Jackie.

In search of a place to plant this new organization, the board identified multiple acres for sale in rural Marion County, a few miles south of Indianapolis—land belonging to Fred and Isabel Duesenberg of the prominent Duesenberg automobile family. For months, the land sat dormant with Damar unable to gain zoning approval.

It was not until Jackie's husband, Harry, a successful and well-known labor mediator, got involved that anything changed. Harry and Jackie took the chairman of the zoning board to lunch to educate him on the need for residential care in Marion County and within days Damar had the necessary zoning to begin changing lives.