

Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living

Success Stories

Adult Services Division

When at first you don't succeed....

Judy (not her real name) was determined. When she first enrolled with the Money Follows the Person program (MFP) she had been in and out of nursing facilities multiple times. Unfortunately, the first time MFP helped Judy return home, after only two days back home with her husband, it was determined that Judy was in renal failure. She was immediately admitted to the hospital for treatment and went back into a nursing facility for rehabilitation. During her seven month stay in the nursing facility, Judy was educated about her new medical condition, learned how to manage a renal diet, lost several pounds of fluid and gained some of her strength back.

After Judy's last readmission to the nursing facility, Judy was determined to try returning home again. However, this time was different. With help from the MFP team and partner agencies, not only did her husband become more involved in her discharge planning process, he was educated about Judy's care plan and they modified their home so she could enter her own bedroom in her wheelchair. This also gave her a private space to store her medical equipment and personal belonging. This was very important to her and she now feels like she's "home".

Judy is very happy to be home. She is enrolled on the Choices for Care program and manages her own Flexible Choices budget. This allows her to hire and supervise her own caregivers. Judy also attends dialysis three times a week and her short-term goal is to attend the adult day center just down the street from her home. There she will be able to socialize and meet other people under the supervision of a nurse and trained caregivers. Judy's long-term goal is to someday move to Florida near her sister. Her determination shows that if you keep trying, your goals can be achieved!

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Fulfilling a Promise...

Joellen Valley, a long-standing member of the Attendant Services Program (ASP) Eligibility Committee, DAIL Advisory Board and vocal advocate for people living with disabilities, recently passed away surrounded by her caregivers, Hospice folks, and neighbors. Just prior to her passing, an ASD clinical coordinator nurse had the privilege of visiting with Joellen and shared her story.

“I had an opportunity to sit and visit with Joellen before she died. When I arrived, she said “Oh Maura, I’m so glad you’re here!” But she didn’t smile – instead she wrinkled her eyebrows and forehead.

Joellen didn’t have much energy at that point, and she stopped and closed her eyes periodically. She asked that I make sure to say “thank-you” to all her ASP friends. She wanted to make sure that I didn’t forget Mary Collins, Gordon Bullard, as well as all the nurses who had visited her, or whom she had met at Committee meetings over the years. I just sat and held her hand for a while. After a moment or so, Joellen opened her eyes again, and said “Now you make sure you tell them, OK?” I said “I absolutely will Joellen.” At that point, I noticed that her eyebrows were no longer wrinkled and she relaxed and smiled. It was if she had checked off a box on a list of important things to do. When it appeared as though she had drifted back to sleep, I got up to leave. She squeezed my hand and said “Thank you so much”.

So, I’m fulfilling my promise to Joellen. I sometimes think we underestimate how much we mean to the people we work with. It’s times like these that remind me now and again...”

Joellen, you will be missed and remembered for all of your valuable contributions to Vermonters.

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Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Sherry's Story....



Sherry has been blind since birth, wears prosthetic eyes and is hearing impaired. She is a Braille reader, a JAWS user and an expert white cane user.

Sherry came to Vermont from Missouri in April of 2013 with nothing but two suitcases and a broken ankle. She had followed her ex-husband who had custody of her children, so she could establish and execute visitation rights.

While staying at Jen's motel, Sherry was referred to and applied for DBVI services. She enrolled in the Homemaker program and received services and aids to further her goal of managing her household and caring for herself and her children. Those services included hearing aids, Rehabilitation Teaching, Low Vision aids and Orientation and Mobility services.

After reaching her goals in the homemaker program, which included moving into an efficiency apartment and receiving treatment for chronic back pain, Sherry decided that she was ready for gainful employment. She had limited work experience and wanted to move forward in her life, so she enrolled in DBVI's VR program in July of 2015.

Since then, she has worked in partnership with her DBVI Rehabilitation Counselor and VABIR job development services in preparation for her first work experience. In December of 2015, Sherry moved from her efficiency into a one bedroom apartment to make visitation from her children easier.

In her new program, Sherry received many services with which to increase her independence and enable her to work toward employment. She received an assistive technology evaluation, a refurbished computer through Resource, an updated JAWS program, a bar code reader, a Braille, Open Book Optical Character Recognition software and a Pearl camera. She also received iPhone training from DBVI's technology trainer who helped Sherry download several helpful apps.

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With the help of the DBVI, VABVI and VABIR teams, Sherry began a work experience in May of 2016 with Goodwill Industries of the Berkshires, Inc. in Rutland. The VABVI Orientation & Mobility (O&M) instructor provided an orientation to the workplace and support to access public transportation. Sherry's job was hanging clothes. She did so well that they hired her. However, she needed a Vermont Nondriver ID. After a great deal of red tape navigation, Sherry received her ID just in time for her hire date.

In an email received from Thomas Kessop Jr. (TJ), Rutland Goodwill manager in July of 2016, he had this to say; "I would like to take the opportunity to thank you and your staff for placing Sherry with our organization. Sherry fits right in, extremely hard working and an excellent team player. We are proud that we can call her one of our employees. The truth is we are here to change lives, but Sherry has changed many of ours. She is an asset to us."

To help his staff better understand blindness, TJ invited the VABVI O&M instructor and DBVI Rehabilitation Counselor to present a training on human guide technique and blind etiquette.

Since her hire, Sherry's job has expanded to cleaning up the sales floor, sorting donations, matching shoes, greeting at the door and bagging. She received an award as Employee of the week in September of 2016 and will be receiving a more formal award for outstanding work ethic.

Amidst all this, in July of 2016, Sherry underwent corrective surgery to better align her prosthetic eyes. Then in the early part of October of 2016, Sherry's daughter moved in with her and they are now searching for larger accommodations.

Sherry's new status amongst the employed now enables her to afford the comforts of life that before were out of reach!

This successful placement has inspired TJ to offer a work experience to another DBVI client!

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Developmental Disabilities Services Division

JOEL'S STORY - About 10 years ago, Joel came onto guardianship through the Office of Public Guardian (OPG). He was just 18 years old and a new world opened to him. Prior to guardianship Joel lived with his birth mother and had had few opportunities for new experiences. Joel has thrived with the support of his guardian and home providers. He's learned how to make good choices, sound decisions and gained the skills he needs to plan for his future.

Some of Joel's accomplishments include:

- Obtaining his high school diploma.
- Entering the workforce and maintaining successful employment.
- Graduating from Castleton State College's College Steps program with a 2-year degree in business.
- Passing his driver's test, obtaining his license and becoming an experienced driver. His home provider was a patient teacher, spending many hours teaching him how to become a safe driver.
- Becoming a seasoned traveler with a national non-profit sponsor of travel opportunities for people with disabilities. He's even become a leader within the organization helping plan and organize a pinball tournament.
- Giving back to his community as a volunteer, including serving as an usher at a local theater.

Joel is a social guy and makes friends wherever he goes. He's an active participant in the local Italian Club, dining there once a week. He enjoys events sponsored by his local agency, especially the social gatherings where he and his girlfriend meet up to dance. Joel has also reconnected with his mother and maintains a good relationship with her. Becoming independent has always been Joel's most important goal. It is his dream that he no longer has a guardian. Working with his guardian and home providers he has petitioned the Court to do just that. It is expected that the Court will grant Joel's petition sometime this fall. Joel deserves full credit for persevering and making it happen!