

The journey of thousand miles starts with one step

Don and Robert

In 1992 Michigan was selected to implement Medicaid program called Community Support Living Arrangements (CSLA), The goal of community supported living arrangements services was to encourage personal independence and productivity.

This program built a foundation and a potential path to self determination. As told in the following story written by Mrs. Bauer, Donald and Robert were pioneers in their community.

Don's Story:

Don is now very happy, living in his own home and making his own choices. That wasn't always the case. At age three, when his parents were refused services at the U.of M. Hospital, in 1963, they were forced to admit Donald to Cairo State Hospital, hoping for seizure control. He was highly medicated, which kept him from walking; he had to wear a helmet so he was protected when falling. Many times he spent his days strapped in a chair or in a caged crib. No education, or training was ever available to Don during the five years he spent at the State Hospital. As he grow older, he was sat in a chair along the wall with 50 plus others to watch TV continuously. There were no toys . Hoping he would be able to play outside Don's parents purchased the first swing set at his cottage. It was obvious from the grass under the swing set, that it was never used. Often times after his parents drove over three hours every weekend to visit him, they'd have to wait another hour before cottage staff would bring Don to them. They were never allowed beyond the closed doors to see where Don lived. After staying in two more facilities, Don's parents were very active locally with the Washtenaw Association for Retarded Citizens) now Association for

Community Advocacy) they worked at obtaining an opening in a group home in Ann Arbor which would bring Don even closer to them.

When Don's parents learned of Community Support Living Arrangements (CSLA), they wasted no time in purchasing a home for Don. Don was always included when house visits were made and together considered the location to nearby stores, bus stops and neighbors. Don picked out his own furniture and chose Robert to be his house mate. They respect each other, enjoy going to movies, shopping and cooking class. With assistance from Washtenaw Community Support and Treatment Services they hire and fire their own staff, and through the voucher system, pay bills. They share duties around the house -- Robert likes cleaning sinks and dusting, Donald loves keeping the kitchen clean and doing laundry. Don also enjoys helping to prepare meals. Don works with the help of supported employment and uses cab service to get to and from work. Don says he is very happy and indicates he is happy with his life today.

Roberts Story

Robert was three years old when he was identified with a disability and put in the Coldwater State Hospital. He remained there until age 32 at which time the hospital closed. He describes his days at Coldwater as bad and always wondered when he could go home. He said there were too many people around, they fought a lot and others always touched him and staff called him names. He never remembers going to school. Robert does remember working in a hot laundry. He did occasionally get to go to the pool. However, he was afraid of the water, because others would push him down and staff did not stop them. He said he remembers going bowling but, most of the time just looked out the window and watched trains go by. He now has a great love for trains.

Robert moved from Coldwater to a group home but always felt he had to stay in his room to keep from others bothering or touching him. He wanted to move to a smaller living situation. In 1994, he made friends with Don and shortly after

Don and his parents asked Robert if he wanted to live with Don in their home. Robert remembers being so happy to move out of the group home. He now had a special friend and his own room. He feels he now has special friends to talk to and that will listen to him.

Robert says Don is a cool guy. They now go together to movies, bowling, restaurants, dance and cooking classes. Roberts works at Dominick's Restaurant bussing tables and cleaning. He says he loves his job and especially enjoys working football Saturdays. Robert says Mr. Dominick Devarti became the grandpa he never had. Robert says his new home, mama and grampa Bauer has made him so happy. Robert was able to buy his own guitar and take a real train trip. He likes making choices and living a normal life. He says he does not feel afraid any more. He has become good friends with his neighbors. Robert and Don are going on 14 years living together. However, know that with out supports from Community Services and Treatment they could not do this. They now hire and fire their own staff and use the voucher system to pay bills.

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