

Hopes + Dreams

How Jennifer's world has grown, thanks to Direct Care Workers

When she was born, Jennifer's parents were told to put her into an institution because she'd never be able to take care of herself.

Today, Jennifer is seeing the world, thanks to the help and support of Michigan's Direct Care Workers.

When Jennifer graduated from high school, she wanted to move out of her parents' house just like her older brother and sister did.

That wasn't typical for most people with disabilities in 1990, but Jennifer's family helped her make it happen.

"Right from the start, my family believed Jennifer needed to be more with people that represent the community rather than always people with disabilities," says Jennifer's sister, Ann. "And so she was raised that way and my mom was always fighting for her to be integrated. And it worked. I mean, we laughed actually growing up that Jennifer had a better social life than I did!"

Today, Jennifer remains in her own condo with support from Direct Care Workers. Outside of her immediate family, Jennifer's two Direct Care Workers are the

staples in her life.

"Jennifer relies on her caregivers, Sarah and Aliesha, for assistance with regular daily tasks but the support she receives means so much more than that," Ann says. "She's just been allowed to blossom and follow her dreams. It's been incredible and it just could not happen without the support she's gotten."

This year, that support was tested when Jennifer contracted COVID-19.

"Aliesha became Jennifer's sole support at that point," says Jennifer's mother, Eileen. "She took over. You have to realize Aliesha has a child at home. She and Sarah took it upon themselves to supply the help Jenn needed. She rearranged her entire schedule and chose



not to work with anybody else so that she could just kind of isolate and be with Jenn."

The approach paid off. Today, Jennifer is healthy and looking forward to the day when she can travel again.

"Jennifer gets around," says Ann. "She's completely autonomous, thanks to Direct Care Worker support. She dictates exactly how her schedule is, what she's going to do, when she's going to do it. And we just kind of help that happen. And it's really nice to watch."

Michigan needs continued state funding to support Direct Care Workers who are making a difference.