

## *Clifford's Story*



For years, Clifford lived in group homes with housemates he did not choose to live with. He was unhappy with the limited options offered in his living environment and expressed an interest in moving into his own apartment, having a clear vision of the housing future he wanted for himself. If you ask Clifford to identify one quality he sees in himself that has been most helpful throughout the process of moving into a home of his own, it is patience. In addition to patience, Clifford is self-determined, as his vision for his future never faltered. Through self-advocacy and the assistance from the Supported Community Living Pilot Project at the Center for Disability Resources, Clifford was able to actualize his housing goals. One member of Clifford's circle of support recalls, "As soon as Clifford moved into his apartment, he commented that he was the happiest

he had ever been." Clifford's friends and advocates who assisted him were speechless when he spoke those words. In addition to his circle of support, his natural supports include his sister-in-law and her children whom he enjoys visiting during the holidays. He also welcomes the opportunity to entertain them in his apartment when they visit him.

Now, after a year of living on his own, with support services in place to ensure success, Clifford is living his dream. When visiting Clifford's apartment, one is greeted with a 'Welcome Friends' mat at his front door. Clifford will be the first to say that he finally has a home of his own, where friends are welcome to drop by for a visit in his handsomely decorated apartment. When asked if he would ever like to live elsewhere, Clifford candidly states, "You couldn't pay me to move."

According to Mary Ann, a circle of support member, as well as, Coordinator of Consumer and Family Empowerment at the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, states, "Since settling into his own apartment, the transformation in Clifford has been amazing. He started out as a very soft spoken man of few words to a person who openly shares his thoughts about what he wants for his life. He is now eager to explore what the world has to offer and try new things." He was recently asked to give a speech at Self-Advocacy Day 2008 at the South Carolina State House. Clifford thought about the invitation for a moment and decided that giving a speech would be a good opportunity to overcome his fears and help others by providing words of wisdom and encouragement for folks who dream of moving into a home of their own. Clifford bravely spoke in front of a crowded audience and was applauded by all after his speech. Continuing to challenge himself and explore new opportunities, Clifford is now in the process of purchasing and learning to use a computer.

The combination of his committed circle of support, and his self-advocacy to enhance his quality of life have proven to others that underneath his soft shell he is a strong and determined man. Clifford has a new found philosophy in life that he shares to everyone he meets, "Living is Lovely."