Eddie’s Story

Eddie is a young man who enjoys life to the fullest! He’s a New York native, which you can gather through his personality, since he is always on the go. He has achieved many of his goals and dreams recently, and still has many more he wants to accomplish. Eddie, however, was not always able to enjoy life to the fullest.

In 2001, Eddie was living in a “high management” group home because some people thought he had “behavioral issues.” Eddie did not get along with his three roommates and wanted things that the group home staff was unable to provide for him. He felt he did not have any freedom, did not like the lack of privacy, and did not like to share his living space with strangers. As a result, Eddie spent most of his time in his room watching TV when he was not at the sheltered workshop. When provoked, Eddie would defend himself with his fists and not his words; his file often contained paperwork that labeled him “non-compliant” or “non-responsive.”

Finally, a small group of people began to see how unhappy Eddie was in his current situation. He hated living in the group home and disliked the workshop setting that was too loud and unchallenging. From this listening evolved a sense of urgency that a workable plan was needed to change Eddie’s life situation. For six months, Eddie and his newfound circle of support began to explore what he really wanted for himself. Eddie often commented that he wanted to live in his own house, but he did not know what this house would look like. Eddie wanted a job that allowed him to work with power equipment, but he wasn’t sure if he would be able to operate it safely. Eddie also wanted to be able to access his home without having to ask permission every time, which he had not ever done before. Eddie and one of his friends spent months driving around various neighborhoods and looking at all types of houses to help Eddie determine his preferences. Eventually, Eddie decided that he wanted to live in a two story house with a big backyard and a pool. This was only the FIRST step. Now came the hard work – the planning and implementation.

In September 2004, Eddie’s circle met to develop his PATH and begin the process of helping him push toward his dream. There were definitely some bumps in the road, but Eddie was willing to compromise at various stages in order to make some changes occur faster. After a year of planning and hard work, Eddie moved into his own apartment with his cousin. It was not a two story house, but it was a two story apartment and it did have a large field and a community swimming pool. It also came equipped with an emergency panic button, sprinkler system, and two car garage! Since Eddie’s funding source was initially tied to the supports he needed in the group home, his circle of support worked closely with the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs to make sure that his funding adequately matched his support needs. Everyone began to realize that Eddie’s need for support had not changed, but the way in which the support was provided needed to change. After two weeks in his apartment with his cousin, Eddie’s behavior support plan was discontinued because his “disruptive behaviors” had ceased to exist!

Eddie’s wish of moving out of the group home and into an apartment was just the beginning of his quest for independence. After living in the apartment for almost two years, he asked his circle of support to help him pursue his dream of living in a house again. He now desired more room and more opportunities to be involved in the community. In 2007, he and his cousin moved into a beautiful two story house in Lexington, SC. The house has a large backyard with enough room for a dog to run around and the neighborhood has a pool and community building.
For several years in the group home, Eddie had been attending a gym and working on his skills in power lifting. He had competed in one power lifting competition and done well, but wanted to continue to increase his weight and stamina to compete regularly. After moving to Lexington, Eddie began working out and training at a local body building gym. In the past year, he has successfully competed in several power lifting competitions, with plans to compete in several more before December. Eddie beams proudly when Brian, his trainer, remarks that he is "freakishly strong."

Eddie's dreams also included gaining employment within the community, particularly in the areas of landscaping, driving a fork lift, or working in a lumber yard. After years of working in a sheltered workshop earning subminimum wage, Eddie worked with an employment specialist from the Center for Disability Resources to obtain a job at Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse where he waters plants, loads trucks, and helps customers. Eddie's supervisor knows that he can count on Eddie to be at work on time and give 150% every day. Eddie's new goal at Lowe's is to be promoted to forklift operator. He has already attended forklift classes at Midlands Technical College and has his forklift certification. Now, if only a position would open up!

Though Eddie still has challenges that he has to overcome, his life is not defined by them. Eddie wants to improve his reading skills to make him more marketable for promotions on his job; he wants to get his driver's license and buy a car; he wants to one day meet someone with whom he can have a lasting relationship. Eddie is on pace to achieve all of this! One member of his circle of support states, "Eddie has improved tremendously on his reading and math skills". He began taking driver's education classes in June of 2008 and hopes to pass the test for his permit soon after! Eddie's life looks drastically different now than it did even a few months ago and those of us who know him best are so excited to see what the future holds for this ambitious young man!