



Tammy's Story

Tammy smiles as she says with all earnest, "I feel like I'm in control of what I want to do in life now!" Unfortunately, this hasn't always been the case for her. For the first twenty-five years of her life, Tammy lived with her "Mom" and "Dad," her biological aunt and uncle. After this she relocated to a segregated apartment complex for people with disabilities where she spent 10 years.

During this time, she had some friends, but would have liked to have more. She felt left out from a lot of activities and didn't feel independent enough to do whatever she desired.

To ensure that she achieved the maximum level of independence she desired, she began advocating to move into her own apartment. In 2005, she moved out of her apartment complex to one within the community near Broad River Road. She had more room than previously, with a full size kitchen, roll in shower, living room, and a bedroom. She enjoyed living in Columbia; her apartment was convenient to her hair dresser, nail salon, and all of her activities. She is able to attend church every Sunday and afterwards she enjoys a southern style home-cooked meal at her parents' home. This also allows her to visit with her grandmother and other family members, and friends.

After settling into her apartment in the community, she placed her name on the South Carolina State Housing Authority's waiting list for a Housing Choice Voucher. She became eligible for a voucher in August of 2007. After months of searching, with support from her circle and the Supported Community Living Initiative, Tammy found an apartment that gave her even more room, located in Lexington. Her current apartment has two bedrooms, two full bathrooms, complete with a full kitchen, dining area, and large closets!

Tammy's success does not end with the apartment. Susan Davis, Employment Specialist at the Center for Disability Resources, worked with Tammy to assess her interests in order to collaboratively develop job opportunities. She began working at McDonald's as a cashier in March. Her boss says she's a wonderful asset to the store, as well as, a hard-worker and being super friendly! Tammy's employment at McDonald's did not come easily though. Just as she had done to move out of her first apartment, she advocated for herself for months to Vocational Rehabilitation, gathered applications and applied for various jobs herself. Ultimately, her efforts paid off.

In addition to all of the physical changes that have occurred in her life and physical community, Tammy has received numerous awards for her advocacy efforts. Recently, Tammy has received the Citizen of the Year Award from the ARC of South Carolina for her successful accomplishment of living on her own and for her efforts in the field of self-advocacy. Tammy has also done some private consulting on self-determination to assist others who want to follow in her footsteps. She is also the Secretary for IMPACT –SC, which is a statewide self-advocacy council with representatives from various counties across the state. She is active in the Protection and Advocacy for People with Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council, and the DDSN Microboard Committee. Tammy doesn't want to stop here; she hopes to own her own house, own a vehicle, and eventually start a family.

Mary Ann, Coordinator of Consumer & Family Empowerment at the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs, and a member of Tammy's circle of support says, "Tammy has gone from a life of limits to a life of choices. It's no longer about what works best for the professionals supporting Tammy, it's about what works best for Tammy. Tammy has tremendous perseverance and never backed down from what she hoped for in life and what she knew she

was capable of doing and having. Life may have changed for Tammy but her self determination has not. She continues to set new goals for herself and those who know her best have little doubt that she'll accomplish what she sets out to do."