

How Four Area People with Disabilities Work and Live on Their Own, With Help

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How many of us have dreamed of having our own home? How many want that home located in our hometown, where we know people, we know the shopkeepers and the street signs, and where people know our name?

— *an announcement from* [STAR, Inc., Lighting the Way](#)

For many adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), that's not only their dream, it's their reality, thanks to a program from the state Department of Developmental Disabilities called Individualized Home Supports.

Here's how several people in Darien and nearby communities were helped by the program:

Charlie, at Whole Foods in Darien

There is hardly a customer at Whole Foods in Darien who is an unfamiliar face to Charlie, who has worked there for over six years.

In a job that makes him beam with pride, he says: “Everybody knows me [...] I get to be outside on my own helping and greeting people, not a lot of bosses, and I just do what I gotta do!”

To get to work each day, Charlie walks from his apartment in his hometown of Norwalk to the East Norwalk Metro North station, where he boards the local train to Darien. From there, he walks to work where he saves his paycheck to pay for rent, phone and shopping.

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His next planned purchase is a Spotify membership. A graduate of Norwalk High School, he likes being on his home turf. "I like Norwalk a lot. It has changed a lot since I was young, but I still know lots of people here."

Elected president of STAR's Self Advocacy Group by his peers, and appointed as a director on STAR's Board of Directors, Charlie is a well-spoken advocate for people with unique abilities.

His work with STAR staff twice a week for two to three hours helps him with budgeting, medical appointments, grocery shopping, banking and sometimes just to have a friendly ear to listen and offer candid advice. He has a roommate who is a better cook than he is, so he helps with the cleanup.

Recently, through the pandemic, he has learned to use his new Apple watch and iPad to track weather, remind him of calendar appointments, check his heart rate, receive messages and consult with SIRI.

Rickey

Rickey is 39 years old and currently works on the housekeeping crew at ARI in Stamford. He serves on their board of directors. Previously, he lived in a group home where he acquired life skills essential to live in an apartment with less staff.

He learned how to do his laundry, clean his room, and take medication on a timely schedule. Today, he lives in an apartment that he has enjoyed for four years with a roommate.

"I am able to do things on my own and enjoy the community. I am able to go shopping by myself, but have staff to help me with tasks that I need help with. Staff continue to teach me how to live on my own to be more independent. I help my roommate and he helps me when needed."

ARI took the time to guide Rickey's transition to independent living, by providing supports as needed along with strengthening his wings to fly.

Talisha

Talisha, an active and engaging young woman takes immaculate care of her apartment where she lives alone. Attending STAR programs for over 25 years, she's lived in an apartment for more than 15 of them. Talisha is as an avid singer in STAR's Rubberband and participates in the annual "Theater of STARS" shows.

Her pride, though, is the independence she enjoys in her own apartment.

Coupled with her job at Goodwill in Norwalk for over 20 years, where she enjoys a paycheck, she is a

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woman on the move, using public transportation and Uber to go to work, go shopping, visit friends, attend concerts and dances, and participate in other STAR leisure programs like girls night out.

During COVID, she joined the online Zoom classes. Talisha receives assistance from staff two times a week for five hours a day.

Recently, thanks to a grant from the state, she also enjoys her Apple watch and iPad to be fully connected to her friends and community. Her apartment is in an inclusive building with easy access to all the city of Norwalk has to offer.

Christian

A neighbor of Talisha's on the other side of the complex is Christian. His staff at CLASP helps him manage cooking, medications and appointments, purchasing clothes and essential items. Self-admittedly not fond of housekeeping, he has a cleaning agency come in bi-weekly to keep his space neat.

He has worked as an essential worker at Whole Foods in Westport for over 25 years — from the time it was previously Food Emporium through the COVID-19 pandemic (with proper safeguards).

Christian is an amazing swimmer and has participated in Special Olympics; he loves politics, parades and church. With staff support, he pays bills with his Social Security payments and income from working.

He receives benefits, vacation and bonuses from Whole Foods. Although he has access to staff 24/7, he has never wanted too much staff and usually has about six to eight hours of face-to-face time weekly. With inter-agency collaboration, Christian also works with the STAR job development staff who provides continue job coaching and support as needed.

Stephen

Steven recently moved to a new apartment near Norwalk hospital that is “bigger and is not a studio where you walk in and see a bed. I finally have one big bedroom.” His new home is convenient to the I-95/Route 7 connector for commuting to work at Wilton Stop and Shop, where he has been over 25 years and continues to work six days a week.

Tuesday is day off for “relaxing” or when he used to care for his 89-year-old father, who, unfortunately, recently passed.

With guidance from his staff, Steven was able to budget his money to purchase a car and negotiate with the dealer on price, financing and service. He established good credit and is now driving his third car, “A Toyota Camry with 89,000 miles that I hope will last over 200,000 miles!” Sharing a sentiment that is common with his friends, Steven says, “All I do is ask for a chance.”

Three of the Area Agencies Providing Help

ARI, CLASP Homes, and STAR Inc., Lighting the Way are three Fairfield County nonprofit agencies which, for over a half century, share a common mission in their desire to provide people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the same opportunities as their typical peers.

Stamford-based [ARI of Connecticut](#), which has roots in the city back to 1952, stands for Always Reaching for Independence. Its mission is to enrich the lives of people with disabilities and their families by enabling them to achieve their fullest potential at home, at work and in the community.

[CLASP Homes of Westport](#) believes each life should be full of dignity, joy, laughter, friendship and interesting choices. For over forty years, their mission is to create and support family environments for people with autism and intellectual disabilities by attracting and retaining a nurturing and dedicated staff.

[STAR, Inc., Lighting the Way](#) is a nonprofit organization established in 1952 to serve individuals of all ages impacted by intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Fairfield County, as well as providing support services to their families.

STAR creates opportunities for individuals to live full lives with independence, freedom of choice and personal growth by providing support, services and advocacy. STAR informs and encourages the community to recognize and appreciate the value of all individuals.