



NEWS

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**Consumer-Focused Service Planning Powers
Tracey Horton’s Success**

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Tracy Horton (R) with case manager Jackie Bragan (L)

AUBURN – For 39 year-old Auburn native and Unity House day habilitation program consumer Tracy Horton, offering services aligned with her desires and goals has been key to her outstanding success.

One of the original consumers of the agency’s day hab services in Auburn when the program started in 1994 who currently accesses program services nine hours each week (three hours each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning), this lively, affable woman has never let her intellectual disability prevent her from participating in structured activities that emphasize meeting her many wishes and needs.

“Tracy is really very intelligent and capable,” beams Jackie Bragan, assistant program manager for Unity House’s Auburn day hab program and Horton’s case manager since 2007, when Horton transitioned back to the program from another human services agency in Auburn. “Once that was recognized, we have been able to plan for her accordingly. Her service plan is very individualized, she has maintained her voluntary status, and it’s safe to say her personal feelings of fulfillment and well-being are generated by our consumer-centered empowerment strategy that is constantly giving her chances to make her own choices and decisions. Sticking with that has allowed her to thrive.”

Those chances to choose opportunities have rarely if ever slipped by the ever alert Horton, who walks to and from her daily obligations in addition to walking two to three miles nearly every day as part of her exercise regimen at the Auburn YMCA. From paying her own phone bill to doing her own shopping, cooking, and laundry, Horton relishes tackling the challenges Bragan and the Auburn day hab staff present to her.

“I am glad I came to this place,” she smiles, when asked what she likes about the agency’s program and staff. “I like the workers here very much and every one who comes here. They give me a lot to do that I like. I like to try what I want and they help me start it and help me with it when it’s hard. Jackie is good to me.”

Besides helping Horton integrate more fully within the community, Bragan and her staff have worked with Unity House’s Auburn employment services in placing Horton in a variety of competitive marketplace jobs. She now has her own PennySaver newspaper delivery route that she attends to every Friday (sometimes she will deliver two routes on Friday, substituting for a carrier unable to do his or her deliveries); cleans for two hours every Saturday at ‘Balloons,’ one of Auburn’s most popular restaurants; and shreds paper at Auburn’s Booker T. Washington Center. Her previous employment experience has included working at Northeast Electronics in nearby Elbridge, N.Y. and at a KMart in Auburn.

Horton is looking to add to her accomplishments at home and on the job by hoping to pursue, with Bragan’s and the day hab staff’s help, a GED at the Cayuga-Onondaga B.O.C.E.S. in Auburn. That challenge will involve her transitioning from home-based study to actual classroom study, a move Bragan and the staff think she could make.

“Tracy has a computer at home with DSL-hook-up, and she’s pretty accomplished with it,” Bragan points out. “She also works with one when she’s here at day hab. She’s our in-house

card maker and maker of flyers and reminders and simple activity calendars. We think her obtaining her GED is a possibility.”

Horton, who lives with three other female consumers at a N.Y. State Developmental Services Office-operated and maintained Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) site in Auburn, converses very well and is well-informed, as evidenced by her knowledge about the recent death of Jurassic Park creator and best-selling science fiction author Michael Crichton, and the recent passing away of Levi Stubbs, the original lead singer of the Four Tops.

“She’s very much on the ball and really stays in touch with all the news,” laughs Bragan, a 1973 graduate of London (England) University’s Nonington College, certified swim class instructor, and Red Cross lifeguard whose 15 years at Unity House have included working as a day hab community integration specialist, job placement coordinator with Unity Employment Services, Medicaid service coordinator, IRA residential manager, and assistant day hab manager. “She likes to stay abreast of a lot of the celebrity items and people that become news.

“She probably likes traveling best because when she does she gets to meet new people, which she loves,” continues Bragan. “Her travels as a day hab consumer to the Buffalo Bills football team training camp in Pittsford, NY and day and overnight camping trips to Letchworth State Park stand at the top of her most enjoyable activities. Increasing Tracey’s traveling experiences is a priority being emphasized in her service plan.”

Horton also counts Dunkin’ Donuts blueberry coffee, the NY Giants football team and Syracuse University sports teams, and President-elect Barrack Obama – “He’s very cute and he will be a good President,” she says – among her favorite things and people.

Bragan and the day hab staff are seeking to increase Horton's hours of participation in their program, to enhance her all ready impressive socialization skills. Doing so, says Bragan, will fulfill Horton even more so.

"The sky is the limit for Tracey," Bragan says. "We'll keep providing her with a plan that will be completely aligned with her desires and goals. There's no end to what she can do."