



NEWS

Unity House Consumer Amy E. Continues to Grow and Prosper

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Amy E (Left) and Tompkins County Day Hab CIS Linda Martins (Right)

ITHACA – Introverted. Unsure and insecure. Unable to tolerate a majority of in-house and community activities. Isolated and pretty much uncommunicative. Afraid.

Such was the description aptly suited to Unity House of Cayuga County Tompkins County Day

Habilitation consumer Amy E. upon her enrollment and beginning days in the agency’s highly regarded program for developmentally disabled adults. She seemed comfortable being directed and led by others and was largely resigned to an existence devoid of any of her own input, desires, and dreams. Her capacity to share those needs and wants, and to discover her strengths and use them to live as full a life as she could, appeared buried beyond her or any other human being’s reach.

Until, that is, she met and became matched with Unity House Tompkins County Day Habilitation Community Integration Specialist (CIS) Linda Martins. From that day on, harnessing all the benefits Martin’s work and the agency’s Day Hab program brought to bear, Amy has evolved to become a true model of program success, characterized by her growth, independence, and emotional and physical prosperity.

“Much of Amy’s successful development is due to Linda’s involvement and belief in and recognition of Amy as an individual with personal preferences and interests,” declared Tompkins County Day Hab Manager Kathy Marshall, who oversees the day-to-day operations of the habilitation program that cares for more than 70 consumers with 22 full-time staff. “It also has to do with the extensive effort we make matching staff with consumers and, also, our programs and services.

“Like all of our Day Hab consumers, Amy got and has an outstanding CIS in Linda, and also had developed for her a very person-centered, person-focused plan,” continued Marshall, who has spent the past four years of her 15 year career as a human services professional in her current Unity House Tompkins County Day Hab position. “Linda’s and the staff’s execution of the plan has been super. Amy has gone from being directed to being very active in determining what she wants and then in making the decisions to get that. She is a great model of just how awesome our consumers can be.”

Martins, who joined the Unity House Tompkins County Day Hab staff in March 2004 after careers working as a pre-school teacher for the Head Start program and raising her own five children over a 25-year period, works solely with Amy Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. She said that sticking to structure and repetition have been integral to Amy’s growth, stability, and progress.

“Like many of our developmentally disabled adults, Amy understands, needs, and thrives on routine,” she said. “Her development is the result of our programs and services and the resulting patience and trust that you have to have occur, between staff who work one-on-one with the consumer and that consumer. Basically, the reason she has blossomed so much and is capable of so much is that we have been able to bring out all that was inside of her. We have

been able to zero in on all the wonderful things we have learned about her, including everything she loves to do and needs, and had her experience many, many activities and situations related to that. This has helped her understanding and has fueled her growth, confidence, and independence. She even demonstrates now her understanding and response to issues at hand by readily vocalizing about that particular issue, which she never did before. She's a marvel at truly leading her life now."

Living in a group home in Tompkins County, Amy's relatively inactive previous life has been eclipsed by one filled with daily activity designed to meet her needs and desires. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, for example, she spends time exercising at the Women's Express Fitness Center in nearby Trumansburg, NY. On Thursdays, she attends an arthritis aquatic class at the Ithaca YMCA and, when the weather turns especially hot in the warmer months, instead heads to the Ithaca College pool to cool off and do her daily aquatic workout there.

"She just loves the water and the Ithaca College pool pass her parents got her has been an added boost for her necessary activities," said Martins. "The lifeguards at both pools just love her and they all greet and acknowledge her. And she responds in kind now."

Perhaps the most important day and activity of Amy's week is Tuesday, when she volunteers for the Tompkins County Library. Martins said Amy's past and current work history has centered around her love of books and their intricacies. She said Amy started out working for the Friends of the Library, a book reconditioning program that refurbishes books to be sold to benefit the library system and local schools. Amy's role in that program required her to master a six-step process of disassembling and reassembling plastic book covers. After doing that job well, she progressed to her current responsibility of sorting out DVDs and videos from the

library's check-out box and shelving them correctly in the library's alphabetized DVD-video Family section.

"Amy knows her alphabet," said Martins. "She places each and every piece as it should be. The work is perfect for her – it's structured, it's repetitive, it offers routine, and it works her cognitive and other skills."

Perhaps, added Martins, it's no coincidence that Amy's father was involved in the development of the library where his daughter now volunteers.

Speaking of Amy's parents, Marshall said they have been as important an ingredient in her success as any other factor.

"They are excellent advocates for her and are very involved in a positive way," she said.

Amy's parents winter in the southwestern United States and spend May through September as well as Christmas in Ithaca. They couldn't be happier with their daughter's development at Unity House's Tompkins County Day Hab program.

"Unity House does a beautiful job with Amy," said her mother. "Linda has been marvelous with her, getting her to do so much more. Maybe most important, and we attribute this to the program and Linda, has been the development of Amy's verbalization of things. It has grown tremendously.

"Amy really has gained in confidence, too," she continued. "She's way more curious and very interested in whatever is going on wherever she is. And she's more productive and is giving back to the community, which we think is fantastic and important to her and the community's health."

For Martins, who earned her Associate's degree in 1999 while attending Corning Community College at the same time with her son and daughter, persistence and commitment have paid off well with her and Amy.

“She's not afraid like she was, she's more confident and outgoing, she loves activities, and she communicates better and better each day,” she said. “She always teaches me something new about herself, which helps me know her better and better understand her needs. We're motivating her to live to her fullest, and that inspires me to do the same. You can't beat that.”