

# living independently and productively

people inc. is making a big difference

By Shannon Traphagen

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), developmental disabilities comprise a diverse group of severe chronic conditions due to mental and/or physical impairments. Individuals with developmental disabilities have difficulties with activities such as mobility, learning, and independent living. However, how we view individuals with developmental disabilities in empowering them to reach their highest goals has changed significantly over the years.

Rhonda Frederick, President and CEO of People Inc. states, "It's interesting to see the evolution from just 50 years ago regarding treatments and options for individuals with disabilities. We've come a long way."

But Frederick feels even greater strides are being taken that will positively impact efforts in 2016. "People Inc. has always been an innovative and creative agency. Because of this, we received a grant from the First Niagara Foundation to enhance our Life Quality Coaching Program, which helps individuals achieve goals that are important to them, such as learning how to use public transportation or strengthening their social skills within a work or community setting. Frederick says, "We've found that many individuals have very different goals. A life quality coach can help them focus on these goals."

Frederick has great hope for the upcoming year, noting that this is a time of great change in the world of developmental disabilities, saying, "We need a stronger push for integrating those with developmental disabilities into regular work placements. Working with companies offering employment opportunities for those with disabilities makes it possible for these individuals to truly integrate into society. There also needs to be more transition planning for those who phase out of one stage of life into the next, such as graduating from high school, entering college, beginning employment, or transitioning into retirement. As modern treatments and programs continue to get better, individuals with developmental disabilities are living longer than they did years ago. So retirement planning is a very real need."

People Inc. offers day programs, housing, early intervention programs, and many other services to support those with disabilities and special needs. Ultimately,



Life Quality Coach Gary Spears helps Jason Smith develop his singing and songwriting skills.

Frederick and People Inc. want individuals with developmental disabilities to learn how to become educated, self-sufficient, and able to advocate for themselves. "Allowing individuals to have a voice of their own is such a powerful thing," says Frederick.

**WNY Resource:** People Inc. is the region's leading non-profit human services agency with 180 locations in nine counties, and 3,400 employees dedicated to improving the lives of 12,000 people annually. People Inc. programs help individuals with special needs, their families and seniors live more healthy, independent and productive lives. See [www.people-inc.org](http://www.people-inc.org) or call 716.817.7400 to learn more.

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