



(L-R) Eric, Edward and David

## DSPs Have a Lasting Impact

Working alongside individuals with developmental disabilities day in and day out, direct support professionals (DSPs) can have a lasting impact on those they serve. From setting goals to overcoming barriers, they are there each step of the way.

Sandie Brown-Maynard, clinical program manager, and her 20 staff members know firsthand what it is like to be there throughout life's ups and downs. When their site Ridgeway IRA in Rochester, NY, first opened in 2013, it became home to six adults who had lived most of their lives in a secure facility. Ridgeway offered its new residents both residential and day habilitation services, all in a community setting. This created a unique set of challenges and opportunities for Sandie and her DSP team.

"We had to teach the individuals what a community was and what it had to offer," said Sandie. "At the same time, we had to find out what their interests were and set goals so they could work their way towards becoming participating members of the community."

The work between the DSPs and individuals started small and gradually moved towards community outings and job readiness training. When the timing was right, the Ridgeway staff helped David, Edward, and Eric secure volunteer positions at a local Salvation Army and the Scottsville Animal Shelter. The foundation of job skills and support provided by the DSPs ensured the men were successful at their duties of loading and unloading cars, organizing and sorting items and working customer service at the Salvation Army and caring for animals at the shelter. They loved their roles and were dedicated, cherished volunteers.

Little did they know, though, that two years later the Salvation Army would close its doors. Sandie and her team were not deterred by the setback – they worked right away to help the men find new opportunities and went above and beyond to ensure they could reach their goal.

"Their volunteer work allowed them to build their skills and confidence so we decided to pursue paying jobs. We put out 100 applications," Sandie recalled. "When no one called us back, my staff and I went out with the men and knocked on the doors of local businesses. We asked them to just give us a chance."

Finally, after months, the answer they had been waiting for came. The Christmas Tree Shops agreed to hire Eric and Edward while a local compost company agreed to hire David. All three men continue to volunteer at the shelter on their days off.

Though Sandie recalls with pride how far the individuals have come, she said their work is not done yet.

"My team is now working with the individuals to set goals for their dream jobs," said Sandie. "We never give up because we believe in the individuals. We will continue working with them, and we won't give up."

Sandie and her team have certainly had a lasting impact on the individuals they've worked with, and in many ways, the journey has just begun. In 2015, they welcomed a new member to their site, who, after facing some challenges is doing very well. The seven-member household is a tight knit group, looking forward to what lies ahead.