



December 23, 2016

Connecting people to resources of their choosing is a fundamental strength of Shared Support Maryland, Inc. (SSMD). As 2016 closes, we ask you to reflect on the importance of connecting with your communities, your neighbors, your friends and colleagues, as they are vital resources that allow you to be resourceful, supported and in control of your life as you move it forward.

During an inspiring conversation that we recently had with Ciara and Melonee Clark, we learned how important and life changing it is for Ciara to make her own decisions, choose what she does and with whom she spends her time. Ciara is a beautiful 23-year-old young woman with autism who greatly enjoys her life. She enjoys the privileges, flexibility and freedom that are often taken for granted. Every day presents rich variety, and Ciara makes meaningful contributions important to her and in the lives of others. Ciara is valuable!

Since the end of Ciara's primary school years, she has gained confidence, autonomy and peace of mind because she *self directs* her services and supports—this is a new experience for Ciara and Melonee. Ciara is in charge. Ciara's SSMD Support Broker finds the resources Ciara is able to rely upon to assist her and carry out her wishes. Ciara chooses who she hires (staff are not chosen for her) from a pool of applicants who are screened and matched based on what Ciara wants to do in her life. The Support Broker performs some of the administrative work that comes with hiring and co-managing staff. She is interested in cooking and her staff have assisted in her learning to do just that. Staff accompanies her to plays and movies and they connect Ciara with job and volunteer opportunities. *Poppin for CC*, Ciara's popcorn business, is popular with corporate and fund raising events, giving her the ability to gain financially. She volunteers at Prince Georges Parks and Recreation, loves to visit her favorite beauty parlor, yoga studio and goes to dances. Melonee says that she and people that have known Ciara for a long time have witnessed Ciara's personal growth because "her whole life has just opened up to new experiences."

SSMD support brokers currently work for 79 people with disabilities who are carrying out their plans for their own lives. By definition, embracing self-direction means you are an employer and you are in charge of your own life. On the basis of developing a person-centered plan, a Support Broker helps identify the supports needed to address what a person visualizes for their future. They then facilitate a planning process with the person, his/her family, friends and assistants to develop a personalized and customized support plan. The person is in the lead, maybe for the first time in his/her life. The person decides what is best and identifies what they want out of life not constrained by preconceived notions of what a person with a disability should or cannot do. An SSMD Support Broker assists by surfacing the most ideal mix of paid services and unpaid collaborations with the goal of moving toward the vision in life that the person sees for him/herself. SSMD Support Brokers rely on shared personal networks, community resources, and deep experience with self-direction to help put a person's plan into action.

Shared Support Maryland, Inc. is the only licensed provider in Maryland that exclusively uses a self-directed individualized service model for ALL inclusive of those with significant disabilities. It is also one of only 75 organizations around the country that use this approach! They have been in existence for 10 years and have become experts with the self-directed model. SSMD has learned the true power and beauty of listening to the people and facilitating personal connections to make lasting and beneficial change for people with disabilities.

With your tax-deductible gift to Shared Support Maryland, Inc., all Board members are making one too, we can all have the fulfillment of knowing we are supporting more people to live their best lives. Let's promote "Connecting in 2017!" Join us!

Sincerely,

Nancy Weiss, Shared Support Maryland, Inc. Board President