



To the Editor,

With the recent uncertainty in New York State about the future of sheltered work centers, my husband and I would like to share some of what we've learned as the parents of a person with developmental disabilities. **This Issue Matters to Me** and I want our legislators to understand why.

Forty-seven years ago, our son was born with Down syndrome. The doctors tried hard to convince us to put him in an institution. With no hesitation, we repeatedly replied, "No, he's going home." I'm not saying life was always easy bringing up our son, but it was very rewarding. We taught him to be independent and never held him back because of Down syndrome. With love, hard work, determination, and dedication from staff members at St. Lawrence NYSARC, who worked with him through the years, he has grown into a wonderful man that everyone enjoys being around.

After high school graduation, he worked for a local restaurant for two years and was in charge of the recycling. Then he went to work for P&C Foods for 18 years. Our experience here was mixed. On the positive side, he had a job coach and there was lots of communication between home and work. His co-workers for the most part were very good to him. Unfortunately, he heard some people make comments that weren't always appropriate and began to mimic that behavior. Also, his work hours varied so much that he basically did not have a social life.

In January 1999, our son had the opportunity to move into an Individual Residential Alternative (IRA). Thanks to St. Lawrence NYSARC and their outstanding staff, he is living the life he loves. The IRA is his home and he takes care of it with pride. He cleans, does his own laundry, helps with meals, mows the lawn, and shovels snow. We very much appreciate this housing option and urge our state lawmakers to keep funding for residential development in the budget.

Our son made the choice to take a job at a St. Lawrence NYSARC Work Center a few years ago. The difference in his attitude from this change is amazing. He's eager to go to work. The supervisor tells us he is a joy to work with. Our son has learned all the different tasks at the Work Center and is able to fill in wherever needed. In May 2015, he was picked as Employee of the Year for his work site and was honored at the Annual Banquet. The dedication of many people in his life made that special night possible.

This is why we so strongly support the Employment First Act. It gives people the OPTION to work in a supportive worksite. The Work Center definitely has been the better choice for our son. We know he is where he wants to be -- in his own home, with a job he loves, friends, and an overall life he truly enjoys.

As parents, we know that when we are no longer in his life, he'll be happy and secure. What more could we ask for? Please let us support our son to maintain the life he has chosen. Thank you!

Barbara & Paul Roeser

