

Nursing Home Resident Advocates for a Better Quality of Life



A refurbished tablet helped set Stacy Moore on a path toward becoming an advocate for herself and her fellow long-term care residents. Yet her journey actually is rooted in her childhood, when Stacy made a habit of standing up to schoolyard bullies on others' behalf and inherited a fierce streak of independence from her "tiny but mighty" mother.

"I come from a very hard-working family — a mixture of entrepreneurs and college-educated people," Stacy says. By her mid-20s, she owned and operated a landscape and small-scale construction business. She was adventurous, too, taking on challenges like skiing, cliff jumping, and mountain climbing.

Ironically, a blood infection, not an extreme sport, caused spinal cord damage that led to her becoming paralyzed in 2007. Stacy was 44 at the time. Her 19-year-old son had recently died, and she was still working through her loss when she sustained the spinal cord damage.

After a lifetime of doing everything for herself, she was suddenly in a position where she could do very little on her own.

“When I was in (Intensive Care), I couldn’t even scratch my nose,” she says. From the hospital, Stacy went to Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation and then to Preakness Healthcare Center in Wayne, where she still lives.

Stacy was still unable to do many things for herself. It was an emotional blow, but she was determined to turn it around. She says her faith and her mother’s influence kept her in the right mindset.

“When I was little,” Stacy says, “she took the word *can’t* out of the dictionary. She said, ‘In this house, that’s not a word. You can do anything you put your mind to. With hard work and God’s blessing, you can do anything. You can be anybody.’”

Several years ago, Stacy took \$50 in birthday money — a gift from a friend at church — and bought a refurbished tablet that changed her life.

The tablet gave her a link to the outside world. She went online to help a close friend learn more about his medical condition. She found and joined a support group for people with spinal cord injuries, thankful for the chance to meet and talk to others with similar experiences.

Stacy also connected with her fellow residents to help them work through issues and improve the quality of their lives.

“I like to make change for the better,” Stacy says. “Even though, physically, I can’t stand up for people, mentally I’m standing up for a lot of people.”

Stacy has made significant progress over the years. She can do more things for herself, though she still uses a wheelchair and she cannot physically type. But voice-to-text and other technologies have empowered to continue her work as she upgraded the tablet to a touch-screen laptop and then a desktop computer.

These days, she is a student in an online college accounting course and a driving force behind a resident-led effort to increase the monthly personal needs allowance (PNA) from \$50 to \$140 and establish annual cost-of-living raises.

For many residents, the PNA is the only money they have to spend on personal needs, including clothing, shoes, hair care, and any food or beverages not provided by the nursing home. In a place like New Jersey, \$50 does not go far.

Stacy and other long-term care residents have been lobbying legislators and collecting signatures on petitions supporting two bills — Assembly Bill A3908 and Senate Bill S3319.

The Assembly Aging and Human Services Committee approved A3908 on June 24. Stacy testified by phone on Monday, Oct. 7, just before the Senate Health, Human Services, and Senior Citizens Committee unanimously approved the bill.

To become law, A3908/S3319 still must pass the full Assembly and Senate and be signed by Governor Murphy. Stacy knows it may take a while, but she remains confident in the bill's prospects.

"I love it when people say, 'Oh, that'll never happen; you'll never get that change,'" Stacy says. "It's like, *Yeah? Watch me.*"