



PLAN|NJ

Planned Lifetime Assistance Network of New Jersey

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Lifetime Advocacy for People with Disabilities

Dear friends of **PLAN|NJ**,

This year, as we cautiously returned to in-person gatherings, I reflected on what it means to celebrate with family and what family means to me. I was grateful to gather with our 'family' of **PLAN|NJ** clients, service providers and partners. It felt so good, and more importantly, it was key to positively impacting the mental and physical health of our clients, many of whom have been with us for years.

For example, Mary Jean is a long-term Guardianship client living with a serious debilitating illness. When her mother passed away, a family friend became Guardian. When that friend was no longer able, the courts requested **PLAN|NJ** to take on this role. We told the story of Mary Jean's life and abilities years ago in the PLAN|NJ News:

"Mary Jean's world is filled with purpose, meaning and a love of life. Although she does have a disability, it does not limit her life. High-spirited and with a fashionable haircut and blonde highlights, she wears stylish glasses, jeans, sweatshirts, and sneakers. She enjoys movie outings with Nadine, her PLAN|NJ service coordinator. They go on many adventures together, enjoying skating, musicals, and animal shows. Mary Jean also uses her exercise

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bike, goes to the gym, and has a trainer to keep her healthy. She knows that PLAN|NJ is her surrogate family. We encourage her to have a social life with friends from her group home and day program. She is sweet and friendly and is a great advocate for herself, informing Nadine during her home visits if she needs or wants anything. PLAN|NJ works to keep Mary Jean's world full of options. She loves animals, especially cats, and is currently working on her group home's quarterly newsletter, for which she is in the process of creating a new section highlighting stories of pets that need to be adopted. She is free to contribute to her life with gusto. We are proud to know Mary Jean and we will be there for her always, ensuring she is free to enjoy her life with no limitations."

Unfortunately, today at age 40, Mary Jean is in declining health. We know too well that as individuals with disabilities grow older, their disabilities can take on more complex manifestations and present new challenges to their quality of life. For the foreseeable future, she has had to move away from her treasured group home and friends into a more appropriate home with skilled nursing care.

We are glad to say that Mary Jean is receiving much love and attention while in skilled nursing care. **PLAN|NJ** arranged music and recreational therapists to each visit her weekly, so she enjoys singing, games, audio books, adapted physical movement exercises and other beneficial activities. She is also visited by a companion twice per week for one-on-one company, also coordinated by **PLAN|NJ**. We formed a circle of support and protection for Mary Jean, as we do for all individuals whom we serve when no family is available.

In New Jersey, 20% of all adults live with a mental health challenge, an intellectual, developmental, or physical disability, or a combination of several. This year, more than 1,900 people benefited from our legal, fiduciary, care coordination, life planning consultation and educational services. We anticipate increasing our services by 10% in the year ahead.

Please help individuals with disabilities like Mary Jean to live with the dignity, protection, and advocacy they deserve. Consider an online donation to **PLAN|NJ** at www.plannj.org/donate. Should you prefer to mail a check, please make it payable to "PLAN|NJ" and send it to **PLAN|NJ**, PO Box 547, Somerville, NJ 08876-0547. Please call or email us with any questions or visit our website today.

Sincerely,

Ellen B. Nalven

Ellen Ball Nalven, M. Ed.
Executive Director

