

United Way of York County funds 74 programs through 37 Partner Agencies. Here is one way your dollars improve the lives of individuals and families in York County.

FOCUS AREA: HEALTH

CUSTOMIZED COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT

PENN-MAR HUMAN SERVICES

Luther stood all alone on the bridge. His dark thoughts turned toward the rough waters below, and feelings of isolation and hopelessness rose to the surface of his conscience.

Luther was born with Down Syndrome, and his childhood was extremely difficult. He did not have a loving family to care for his needs and he was moved from place to place with distant relatives who had little means or desire to provide the care he needed. When he reached the age of 21, he was eligible for support from a human services organization, Penn-Mar Human Services. Luther began work in their sheltered workshop doing contract work for a tool company.

In addition to his intellectual disability, he also suffered from depression. Although he was in a protected environment, he didn't feel content or fulfilled. The work was not challenging for Luther, and he quickly became bored. However, one of the goals he had in his life was to get his driver's license and buy his own car.

Someone saw Luther on the bridge that day and took the time to talk with him and encourage him to never give up. At the time, Penn-Mar was making a transition from sheltered workshops – where individuals with intellectual disabilities could earn a wage but not necessarily in a field of work they enjoyed – to a robust, diverse customized employment program that identifies the needs of an employer and matches them with the skill set and desires of individuals with disabilities.

Luther eventually found a car to buy and took great care of it. It was the first time he owned something that was truly his. Not long after, a job developer for Penn-Mar Human Services spotted him washing his car and asked him if he enjoyed detailing cars, to which Luther eagerly replied, "It's my favorite thing to do!" The job developer was then able to search for a company that detailed cars and had need for workers.

Penn-Mar Human Services identified a company that expressed frustration at the high turnover of employees who didn't stay in the job for long, and Luther was given the opportunity. He was equipped with a company van that drives through the dealership detailing the cars and washes the cars being serviced.

That was 4 years ago. Today, Luther is one of the most beloved members of the team. He has received multiple raises as well as the coveted company jacket with his name embroidered on the pocket. **Luther says, while the raises have been nice, it is the praise and the appreciation for the work that he does that gives him the most satisfaction.** Luther is now living independently in a Penn-Mar house, working in a job he loves and feeling the fulfillment of a life he was able to choose. Thanks to the United Way of York County Community Fund and all it does to build bridges of opportunities, people like Luther are happy and thriving.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

