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THE GOOD LIFE

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Damon Reynolds, with Support from LifePath CTL Peter-Michael Kinney, Is Moving Back into the Community



Janis Merrell

*By Janis Merrell, Editor of
The Good Life*

Damon Reynolds, 48, has been a resident at Quabbin Valley Healthcare (QVH), a nursing home in Athol, for about 4 years. With help from his LifePath

Community Transitional Liaison (CTL), Peter-Michael Kinney, Damon will soon be moving to a group home in Shutesbury. "I'll be able to be in a community and be able to see my grandkids more frequently," said Damon, who is excited about the move. Damon has four children along with four young grandchildren, and two of his daughters work at QVH.

Damon grew up in Fitchburg, Massachusetts and worked in fabrication, construction, and home remodeling. He moved to Western Mass to be closer to his father, and decided to stay because he enjoyed living in the country. After experiencing an acquired brain injury and complications from diabetes, Damon was admitted to QVH. "The hardest part about being here is, like people's illnesses . . . I watch people go. That's really hard for me . . . I met so many nice people here, some come, some go," explained Damon.

Peter-Michael added, "You seem to make a lot of friends with the younger folks coming in with rehab, you know. And I understand the nursing home, that most of the people here, it's a different journey that they're taking. Yeah, that's why I was happy to get you out of here, because your journey isn't done yet, you know."

Damon's mom, Marie, was another driving force, and had been trying to get Damon on the Acquired Brain Injury Residential Habilitation (ABI-RH) Waiver, but just couldn't follow up with all the paperwork, so it kept getting denied. Peter-Michael started working with Damon and Marie in April 2024. He explained, "Marie was a big part of this. She was the full force. When I first started at QVH, she was like 'don't be playing games with me. I'm getting my son out of there. And if you're here to help, you're going to help me, you know.' And Marie was his health care proxy, too, and I needed documents and signatures from Marie and we had to use the US mail which made it time consuming. Marie was also sick and frequently in the hospital and difficult to reach. Marie really wanted to be part of the process and

make sure he was accepted. I always tried to keep Marie updated with everything we were doing."

Marie was battling Alzheimer's while advocating for her son to reside at a group home and had recovered from breast cancer four times. "She was my will," said Damon. Marie passed a little over a month ago, but knew Damon had received the ABI-RH Waiver and that he was going to move to a group home in Shutesbury before she died.

A group home is a better fit for Damon, and allows for more freedom, continuity, and opportunity. Peter-Michael explained, "As a CTL, I'm in each nursing home every week for a couple hours, and I sit in on activities. I tell them who I am and what I do, and then I get referrals from family members, from the residents, and from the social workers . . . [Damon's social worker] indicated that Damon really wanted to try to get back into the community, but wasn't able to just step right back in—we needed to figure something out for him, to help him to get out there. He needs daily living management, so just trying to find him an apartment—we didn't think it was a great idea, but with the ABI-RH Waiver that we got him on, they really help with everything that he's going to need once he gets in there. And the group homes, which I think are wonderful, adapt to you as you get older. It's not like, 'oh, Damon, you can't use this anymore. You got to go, buddy.' That's not the way it works. They adapt to make sure all your needs are filled. Which is a good thing."

When asked what he was looking forward to after the move, Damon said, "I want to volunteer. I'm not worried about making money. That's why I always say volunteering, because you can do what you want, like, find something that interests you, that you want to help someone, you know that'd be a good thing." He is also looking forward to utilizing transportation through the group home's van: "I want to go visit my grandkids. I can tell them in advance, I'd like to go here on such and such a day . . . freedom, to be able to go into the community, look around to meet people. I have a lot of friends that live in Worcester, they can come to visit me, too. I'm definitely happy to move."

Reflecting on Damon's successful application, Peter-Michael said, "I work with a lot of people in my role as CTL and I am not always able to make a difference in everyone's lives. In this situation, many different people and organizations have been involved to try and make a difference in Damon's life. I would like to thank the administrative assistants to supervisors to all the different people who work for MFP, DCS, the Waiver Unit, QVH, and anyone else that made it possible to transition Damon back into the community. While we wait for Damon to transition to his new home in Shutesbury, Damon's smile on his face seems to get bigger every week I see him."



Damon Reynolds (left),
with LifePath CTL
Peter-Michael Kinney (right)