

# MY LIFE NOW ↗



The Beauty of a Home:  
A Journey With Carmelys Vincent



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# MY LIFE NOW

Spotlighting individuals who have transitioned from developmental centers, nursing homes, and family homes to vibrant community settings. **Celebrating their journeys.**

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“Disability should never disqualify anyone from accessing every aspect of life.”

EMMA THOMPSON

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# What is community living?



## **ABOUT US**

The Community Living Education Project, usually referred to as CLEP, works with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families and caregivers to explore the possibilities of community living.

Our mission is to assist individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in New Jersey to live lives of choice within their communities.

## **WHAT IS COMMUNITY LIVING?**

Community living values each person's strengths and abilities and supports them in pursuing their own goals and aspirations. Person-centered supports and services enable people to establish a valued presence in their communities.

Community living offers opportunities to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to choose where they live and explore their hopes and dreams. A valued presence in a community is something we all strive for. It allows us to be recognized as contributors to our community as neighbors, friends, volunteers, and taxpayers.



## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *My Life Now*.

After a successful decade as a print magazine, The Community Living Education Project (CLEP) is thrilled to re-launch this publication in an online format.

Our mission remains the same: to spotlight individuals who have transitioned from developmental centers, nursing homes, or family homes to vibrant community settings. We celebrate their journeys of empowerment and self-discovery and share how they have embraced choice and control in their lives.

At CLEP, we believe that everyone deserves a life of choice and control. Yet, we also recognize that for many individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, this concept remains elusive. Through our work, we strive to instill the principles of person-centered planning, empowering individuals to shape their destinies.

Throughout this online magazine, you'll see opportunities to view videos of the featured individual. We felt it was important to share their stories in their own words whenever possible.

In this edition, we shine a spotlight on Carmelys Vincent, a remarkable individual whose story epitomizes the essence of a person-centered approach to community living. Carmelys was featured in our recent documentary video, *From Possibility to Reality: Person-Centered Approaches to Community Living* because she is proof of what is possible with the right supports in place. In this edition of *My Life Now*, Carmelys shares more about her experiences and insights as she navigates her new life, as well as the opportunities she found after her participation in our documentary.

I know you will find her story as compelling as I did.

*Anna Martinelli*

[CLICK HERE](#)



to view the film  
*From Possibility to Reality: Person-Centered Approaches to Community Living*

[CLICK HERE](#)



to view a video of Carmelys talking about the opportunities she found after being featured in the film.

# THE BEAUTY OF A HOME

## A Journey With Carmelys Vincent

BY ANN MARTINELLI

**“THE FACT THAT I FEEL SAFE,  
CAN CREATE RELATIONSHIPS,  
AND CALL THIS A HOME IS  
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING.”**



Carmelys in front of her new home with Isabella Nyabeta, Director of Momcares

[CLICK HERE](#)



to view a video of Carmelys talking about the “beauty of a home.”

Carmelys' journey is one of resilience and determination. After facing challenges that led to hospitalization and an extended period in a nursing home, she found CLEP's website during an online search for support. With CLEP's assistance using person-centered approaches, Carmelys transitioned to a group home operated by Momcares Services, a licensed provider through The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). Since then, Carmelys has flourished, embracing her newfound independence, and actively engaging with her community.

Describing Piscataway as a peaceful suburb with proximity to downtown New Brunswick, Carmelys wasted no time in immersing herself in local initiatives. One of the first things she noticed as she walked around her new neighborhood was uneven sidewalks. Carmelys uses a walker for mobility and knew that if she had difficulty navigating the sidewalks, others would, too. People pushing a stroller, young children and those who use wheelchairs would struggle and not be safe on uneven pavement. She contacted the mayor's office and spoke with someone about her observations.

Her initiative-taking approach quickly yielded results. Shortly after she contacted the mayor's office, Carmelys noticed markings on the sidewalk near her home indicating that repairs would be made. She was energized that she could be effective in making a difference for her community and plans to follow up with an application to participate on the mayor's advisory committee for people with disabilities.

[CLICK HERE](#)



to view a video of Carmelys talking about her experience working with the Piscataway mayor's office.



With the Director of *From Possibility to Reality: Person-Centered Approaches to Community Living*, Hébert Peck

**“I’VE SPOKEN WITH THE MAYOR’S OFFICE ON A COUPLE OCCASIONS ABOUT ESTABLISHING DIFFERENT ADVISORY BOARDS FOR DISABILITY.”**



Celebrating a birthday in her new home

Carmelys' new life has no limits, and she enthusiastically described the new opportunities she continues to explore. She has contacted and visited local farmers markets, a food cooperative in New Brunswick, the JFK library in Piscataway, DDD self-advocacy groups through the Office of Education on Self-Directed Services and the Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey.

A notable connection was made when CLEP introduced Carmelys to The Richard West Assistive Technology Center (ATAC) of Disability Rights New Jersey at the film premiere of *From Possibility to Reality: Person-Centered Approaches to Community Living*. She participated in their September 2023 two-day summit as a presenter on the topic of "The Disparity Gap Between Mental Health, Disability, Technology and Minorities." Carmelys was also a panelist during a discussion on the psychology of a person-centered approach to planning for people with disabilities and using technology. Carmelys continues to communicate with ATAC sharing her ideas for new initiatives and how to better connect people with disabilities to assistive technology.

[CLICK HERE](#)



to view a video of Carmelys talking about assistive technology.

Carmelys at the film premiere



(left) Carmelys and Isabella standing on the ground that would later become Carmelys' garden



to view a video of Carmelys talking about her garden

Carmelys also has been in touch with The New Jersey State Library Talking Book & Braille Center, (TBBC). Her personal experience allows her to share with others the possibilities and positive outcomes of using technology. Carmelys shared that she sees many immigrant parents who do not understand and how AT can assist in their child's education and future successes.

When the CLEP team first met Carmelys, she dreamed of having a garden of her own. This passion bloomed into a tangible reality during the summer of 2023 when she planted her first vegetable garden. "We had tomatoes, spinach, African herbs, and we ate what we produced. We had so much we shared with everyone!" Carmelys had a bountiful crop through the early fall, and she is excited to plan for her 2024 garden. She is beginning to look for the seeds she needs for spring planting and how to expand her original garden. Carmelys is also eager to explore and become involved with the Rutgers University Garden Club.

Additional thoughts on expanding and sharing the abundance include creating a vegetable exchange or barter system. Carmelys wants to share her love of healthy food with her community.





**“IT MAKES ME HAPPY JUST TO HAVE THESE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE WITH PEOPLE.”**



Carmelys is greatly motivated by her faith.

During our conversation with Carmelys we asked her what she is looking forward to doing in the future that would make her happy. She quickly asked if she could reframe the question because “it’s not happiness, it’s joy, and I already have it.” Our dialogue continued with Carmelys revealing so much more of her life now and how she arrived at where she is today.

Carmelys shared her struggles and easily communicated that she was once “bombastic” and knew she needed to change when she first met Isabella at Momcares. Carmelys had a personal transformation when she began to allow the use of person-centered approaches into her life. Isabella’s patience and support encouraged Carmelys to feel comforted and safe in her new surroundings and allowed her to see “the beauty of having a home.”

Carmelys believes that when you are loved you can share and she became most animated when she shared her faith. She belongs to a small congregation in Union City and is an active member at the church and through its ministry.

Carmelys also shares her faith and love with others and through her journals, particularly her gratitude journal. Recording her thoughts and feelings allows her to reflect and see herself grow. Carmelys reflected on having different relationships with each staff member at her home and the value that brings to her life because each person contributes to who she is and will become. Advocating for herself and expressing her needs has allowed her to grow to not only give love but receive it, too.

Looking ahead, Carmelys aspires to empowering others, particularly youth and students with disabilities. She is taking classes to learn more about supporting others, clearly reflecting her dedication to making a meaningful difference in people’s lives.

Carmelys journey exemplifies the transformative power of a person-centered approach to community living.



If you or someone you know have an intellectual and/or developmental disability and live in New Jersey, we can help. We work one-on-one with individuals and families as mentors and guides to navigating all the different services, programs, and options available to you. From where to live to setting up services, to pursuing hobbies and interests, we'll help you make informed decisions that will allow you to live as integrated members of your community. Please get in touch if we can help.

All services are provided 100% free-of-charge.

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