

A Member of the Family

By Emily Fritz, Communications Specialist

A big bowl of frozen yogurt was in front of Sissy Sargent, a 36-year-old Family Living Through Life Sharing Program (Family Living) participant, when I arrived to chat with her and her providers, Stephanie and Amanda Wincik. Sissy had just arrived home from volunteering at a local daycare by reading books through an adaptive switch, and she was hungry for her afternoon snack. I sat beside her at the kitchen table, as the family made me feel right at home.

Stephanie, who is employed as the assistant director of nursing at EHCA, and her daughter, Amanda, who has also worked in direct care at one of EHCA's group homes, shared a little about what it is like to have Sissy as part of their family. Sissy, whose adoptive parents both passed away, had been living in EHCA group homes for about ten years, when the government started to push the idea of moving individuals with disabilities out of the group homes and in with Family Living providers in the community. That's when the Winciks were approached about Sissy moving in with them, permanently and with the idea that Sissy would become part of their family forever.

"We took the time to think about it for a while," said Stephanie. "We knew it would be a big commitment, and we wanted to make sure we could truly meet Sissy's needs before making our decision."

While the extended family was hesitant at first, Sissy has now become a part of the family. She lives full-time with the family, goes on family vacations, and shares in family holidays. Everything they do, they do together.

"Of course, there were adjustments we had to make," said Stephanie, who had to get used to the idea of blending the family meals for Sissy, who is diagnosed with Down Syndrome and also exhibits autistic features. "It's a lot of work. Some days I want to lock myself in the bedroom for a five-minute break. Overall, it's a very positive thing for all of us; Sissy, too.

She's changed our lives for the better."

While Stephanie feels the ease in working at EHCA and being a provider, there are others who welcome people into their homes and families. Currently, EHCA provides services to 18 individuals in 16 Family Living homes. Each home is licensed annually by the Department of Public Welfare's Office of Developmental Programs. We must maintain this license to continue to provide services to these individuals. There are 430 regulations EHCA must comply with for this program, some of which are in the areas of: individual rights, supervision, fire safety, individual health, family health, medications, nutrition, day services, recreational and social activities, restrictive procedures, individual records and emergency placement.

To learn more about Family Living, contact Chuck Lee (814-454-1534 x182, lee@ehca.org, or visit our Web site at ehca.org.



Sissy likes to sit and chat, listen to music, enjoy the outdoors, and cuddle with her stuffed dog, Snickers. Here, she recently went on vacation with Stephanie and Amanda to Williamsburg, VA.



*Pictured here:
Sissy Sargent, Amanda Wincik, Stephanie Wincik*