

Josh Santiago, Jay Pusey and Jamal Saad feel like family at New Hope Community in Loch Sheldrake.



What it's like to live at New Hope Community

STORY AND PHOTO BY ISABEL BRAVERMAN

The people who live at New Hope Community in Loch Sheldrake spend their days working outside on a farm, hanging out with other residents, participating in daily activities and going to board meetings. They are people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities; many of them require a wheelchair or other physical aids.

But life at New Hope gives them the independence to live their lives fully, with friends, jobs and responsibilities. The people who live there live in residences with support staff. Other people live at home or elsewhere and come to New Hope for day programs.

For over 40 years, New Hope Community has been enhancing the lives of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It's a place to learn, where life skills can be immersed with support professionals

that create environments of innovation.

The people receiving support services work closely with the staff and form special relationships. "It's like a second family," Josh Santiago said. "All of us have our own little friends, our little place in the world." Santiago is 24 years old and has lived at New Hope for four years.

He, along with Jamal Saad and Jay Pusey, sat down recently to talk about their experience and day-to-day life at New Hope.

"I advocate for myself to get stuff done when it needs to be done," remarked Saad, who is 38 years old and came to New Hope 15 years ago. "There are times when it can be difficult, but then it can be easy as long as you ask for help they can assist you on your daily living."

Self-advocacy is a big part of New Hope's ethos. Through teaching, coaching, encouragement and role

modeling, they advocate for people to integrate and participate in the wider community.

One way to do so is through Hope Farm located at the SUNY Sullivan campus. Santiago and Pusey both work at the farm. "We become a little farming family kind of, right Jay?" Santiago said. Jay, who is 41 and came to New Hope 15 years ago, agreed.

The idea of family is something that all three of the men feel with their peers at New Hope. They have many friends and enjoy spending time together. They said when they first got there it can be challenging because you don't know anyone and they don't have that level of comfort. But soon they all made friends and got to know the support staff.

One member of the staff, Michael Noren, is the Assistant House Manager/Self-Advocacy Leader who joined ten years ago. Working at New

Hope Community, Noren said that, "I never really thought about the 'rewarding part' of doing this job. To me just knowing that I helped make someone's day a little better is good enough." He leads the Self-Advocacy Group and assists with things such as conferences and moderating meetings.

As a non-profit, New Hope has a board of directors that meets regularly. There's usually a person that New Hope supports that is invited to join the board as a representative and Jay was recently asked. Jay is also in the band and plays guitar.

All in all, the three men agreed they love living and working at New Hope. "I'm very happy here sometimes, but there's ups and downs," Saad said. Santiago joined in: "It's like any place," he said. "But for the most part all three of us have each other and all of the people here. So I have no complaints."