

Michael: 'If you want independence, you have to work for it'

Michael, 58, landed in a number of nursing homes after a fall that left him hospitalized. But that history, and a hip removal that put him in a wheelchair, haven't slowed Michael down.

Now living in his own apartment in Mount Laurel, Michael attends classes five days a week at the Burlington County Community College (BCCC). He is studying to be an alcohol and substance abuse counselor.

"My insurance and my case manager were instrumental in my re-integration into the community," Michael said. "They bought my furniture and paid for a private duty nurse for me through the Personal Preference program, meaning I hired the nurse and I administer her."

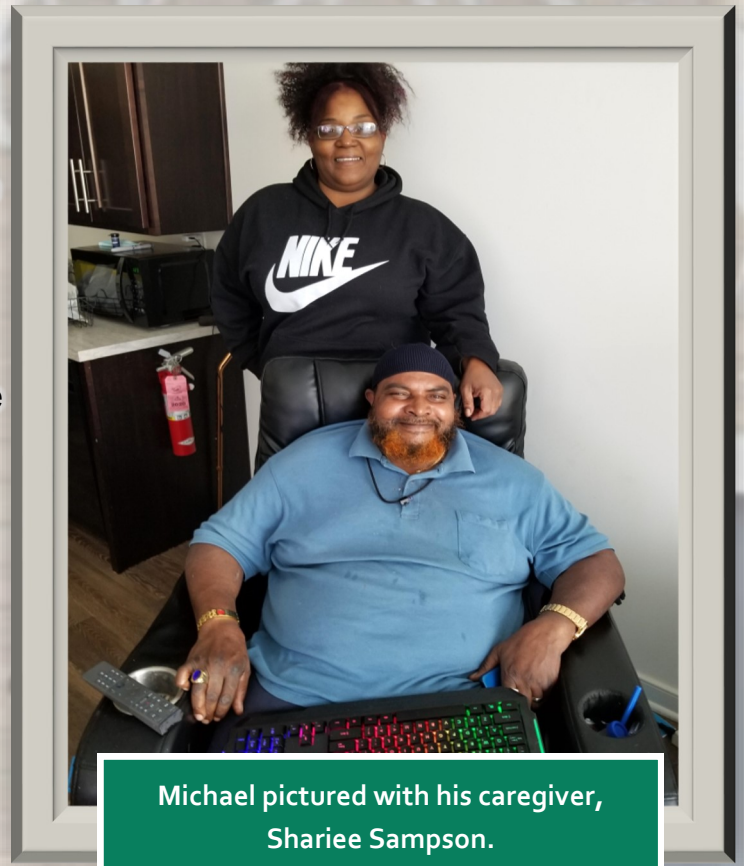
He subscribes to Access Link bus service that picks him up at the front door and takes him to college. Conveniently, one of the college facilities shares a building with his doctor's office. On weekends, he might wheel his chair across the road to Centerton Square Mall to shop.

"Oh yes, I enjoy my independence," Michael affirms.

Michael believes that if a nursing home resident has the desire to make it happen, they should pursue their vision of independence. In his case, that includes doing his own laundry, interacting with other people in his community, scheduling his own doctor's appointments and transportation, and more.

"You have to work for it," he said. "I started 12 months ago getting my name on waiting lists."

"The nurse told me, 'You are a success story, because you stayed focused and got back into the community,'" he said.



Michael pictured with his caregiver, Shariee Sampson.