

Everyday Heroes: Easterseals New Jersey

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NEW BRUNSWICK - A nationwide job training program is helping people with disabilities by giving them independence, and inclusion.

The Easterseals Raritan Valley Work Center in Middlesex County has been doing it for 33 years.

"You come in and make money for your pocket, you go home happy," says Ron Carroll, of North Brunswick.

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Felita Johnson is the associate director at the center, overseeing the staff and nearly 200 program participants with different disabilities as they perform packaging services for various clients.

"For a lot of people, it's the first job that they've had, so it's about getting adjusted, getting used to coming to work every day," says Johnson.

The staff works with each individual to find the right job for them, then develops a plan for their unique abilities.

"We start off with something that's a little simpler task, so we get to know what the person's ability is," says Johnson.

Ron Carroll has been in the program for 17 years and just received a big honor.

"It felt good, I got a great big plaque, it's already hanging up on my wall," says Carroll.

Johnson says moments like that make the program so special.

"We had a gentleman here who hadn't spoken," says Johnson. "Hadn't spoken, he had been here I don't know how many years. And then one morning I said hello to him and he said hi. That, I think was the most moving moment I've ever had."

The moment may have never happened if it wasn't for Easterseals. Some participants go onto outside jobs by using their training. Others continue in the center and develop, thanks to the sense of community.

"They're heroes because they are the reason that we're here," says Johnson. "They're heroes because they want to be to work."

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