

Program director Samuel Wellington, right, helps John Crowley make a phone call to his sister at Bridgewell's Chestnut Street residence.



# NO PLACE LIKE HOME

## Bridgewell helps connect Crowley with safe living space

BY PAUL HALLORAN

The staff at Bridgewell's Boston Street day habilitation center affectionately refer to John Crowley as the "Mayor of Boston Street," so it is understandable they would want to ensure he have housing fitting of that designation.

Crowley, who has cerebral palsy with developmental disabilities, has been participating in day services at Bridgewell for 13 years, but until recently he was living on his own, with supports from another agency. That arrangement had outlived its effectiveness, and Crowley's team of caregivers at Bridgewell knew it.

"John's living situation was getting progressively more difficult," said Susan Scott Craven, Bridgewell's Clinical Director of Day Services. "He had a few falls in his apartment and there were times he would start choking while eating. He needed 24-hour support."

Crowley's Bridgewell team met with him last summer and discussed their concerns, primarily for his safety at home. He also needed a new wheelchair and access to better transportation services.

But even though Crowley acknowledged he needed a change, he was in no hurry to go anywhere.

"We had to tread gingerly," Craven admitted. "John did not want to move into a group home, so we needed to find something that he would be comfortable with."

Crowley's service coordinator from the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, Yajaida Blanco, along with his case manager at Boston Street, Rachel LeBlanc, took him to look at two apartments, one on Salem, the other in Lynn, on Chestnut Street. He liked the latter, but he still needed to be sure.

"No one likes change. John was very worried about moving," said Sam Wellington, the program director at Chestnut Street. "We had to convince him that if he came to live here, he would be in a safer living situation. We have 24-hour staff and a wheelchair van available." And Crowley would have only one roommate, Kent, with whom he had dinner to get acquainted before agreeing to the move.

To consummate the deal, Crowley, an avid TV watcher, was promised a flat-screen in his bedroom. Sold.

"I was a little scared at first. It was a big change," said Crowley, who also has a state-of-the-art wheelchair that could pass for a mini car. "But I made the right decision."

The staff at Bridgewell enthusiastically agrees.

**“THIS IS ONE OF THE MAJOR SUCCESS STORIES.”**

"In the almost 30 years I've worked here, this is one of the major success stories," Craven said.

"I've been relocating individuals from one place to another for a long time," Wellington said. "John's transition seemed like it would be the most difficult, but it turned out to be the easiest."

LeBlanc, who spends at least four hours a day with Crowley — he also works in the employment program three hours daily — has noticed a marked difference in his demeanor.

"He comes in all smiles, literally," LeBlanc said. "His confidence has gone way up."

Crowley proudly tells a visitor that not only does he start his

daily routine with a renewed attitude he also recently went to the mall to buy a new CD. And, "I'm sleeping like a baby," he said.

He isn't the only one. Crowley said his sister, Jeanette Gagnon, told him that she can rest easy now that he has a new living arrangement. "My sister can sleep well now," he said. "She doesn't have to worry about me."

Now that the good weather has arrived, you might find Crowley sitting on the porch watching the ducks make their way across Flax Pond. Or, he might be in his room watching the Red Sox on his new TV. Maybe he will be on an outing to the mall. Whatever it is, chances are he will have a smile on his face.

And so will the staff at Bridgewell, knowing they have successfully connected another person with a possibility.

For more information on Bridgewell please visit [www.bridgewell.org](http://www.bridgewell.org) or call 781-592-1088.



JOHN CROWLEY