

I am writing in support **lifempowered**'s request for funding help with our Empowerment Center. This project represents our move from Riverside Training Centers to **lifempowered**. Thirty years ago, when I brought my nonverbal autistic foster son, Craig, to Riverside (now **lifempowered**) there were tables filled with people with disabilities assembling items in an effort to obtain job skills. Craig hated it and refused to participate. I didn't blame him. At that time once someone finished public education, at age 21, there was no real option for continuing social or work life. I had been away from the field for some time when I re-discovered **lifempowered** through a community meeting. I immediately joined the board to help in this new approach to services for our fellow citizens with disabilities. Now clients have individual job coaches, specialized training and other options to attain the life they want. Many are in the workplace right in our county. Others live productive, happy lives at home. We are truly part of the community, not hidden away.

lifempowered plans to build a new Empowerment Center to become an accessible center for socializing, engagement, education, and community interaction. People can prepare meals in an accessible kitchen, use accessible bathrooms, exercise in a safe space, learn new skills, socialize with other community members and much more. It truly represents the change we have made as a society in our approach to a good life for these fellow citizens. It says a lot about who we are in Columbia County and makes me proud to live here.

Carroll Sweet

Board Member for **lifempowered**