

## Employment First and Community Inclusion Stories- Self Employment

### Mara Clawson- “Let the Colors do the talking”



Pictured left: Mara Clawson next to her work: Walking in the Rain

In June, I had the pleasure of first meeting Mara, a local artist, when she was displaying her art at a distillery in Frederick, MD. Mara had a number of pieces of her art displayed, so I went up to find out more. I learned from Mara, and her mother, Michelle, that she was a 2016-2017 Kennedy Center VSA Emerging Young Artist with Disabilities Award winner. This is a national juried exhibition of 15 winners whose artwork was on display at the Kennedy Center for the month of July and is touring nationally. Mara explained that many of the pieces I was looking at had been created using her iPad and that I could come see her studio sometime. A few weeks later, I had the pleasure of seeing Mara’s studio space in person, as well as the chance to ask her more about her art, the support services she receives and her inspirations.

Mara’s studio is in her parent’s home in Bethesda, MD, where she creates many of her artworks. When Mara first got interested in art, she used primarily soft and oil pastels. It was only more recently, in early 2016, that she got her first iPad on which she creates many of her current pieces. When deciding which art medium to use, Mara says it “depends on her mood.” Mara showed me her process for creating (pictured below) art on her iPad device. She has a unique style of color layering that was interesting to watch in action. Mara explained that her main subjects are usually animals, food and people, as well as stories from her imagination. Along with creating pieces based on her feelings, Mara also does some commission work, including people and pet portraits.

When having the opportunity to watch Mara create a picture of a bunch of bananas, I asked how she



knows when a piece that she is working on is finished. She told me “when colors get along.” When Colors Get Along is the name of Mara’s art business. Mara is inspired by colors, making people happy, and her unique perception of the world. In her award-winning video [“To Survive”](#), you can see how Mara layers her colors and her narration shares her view of the world and the importance of art in her life.

Along with creating art in her studio, Mara also enjoys a full life with her friends, family and coworkers. She told me how she had recently learned to access Call-N-Ride so that she has more freedom to meet her friends at movies, bookstores, and restaurants on weekends.

Mara is also working on using some different art media, including ceramics and fused glass, at VisArts, where she goes once a week; and painting, at Art Enables, where she goes twice a week. Mara Self-Directs her DDA services; and she explained that this allows her to “find her own right path”. Self-Direction also allows Mara and her family to interview and hire her own staff to be sure there is a good match. They have found this to be beneficial and has created life-changing services. Mara’s art and Self-Direction have led her to greater self-sufficiency, self-confidence, and empowerment.

To see more of Mara's artwork or to see where her art is currently being displayed, please visit [www.MaraClawson.com](http://www.MaraClawson.com)