

A sense of purpose unlocked Habitat for Humanity work lets Bastarache engage his passion

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ST. CATHARINES -- Watching Terry Bastarache work his magic on donated locks at the Habitat For Humanity ReStore is an impressive sight.

Handed a lock removed from an old door, Bastarache will take it apart and adjust the insides so it will work with one of the keys he has in his set. If the lock is of no use, Bastarache can usually take it apart and remove the reusable parts for later projects.

Bastarache, who has volunteered at the store for the last four years, is at his happiest when he's working with locks. It's an obsession of his. He's filled three scrapbooks with images of locks and keys taken from the internet. He also likes to take antique locks and mount them as artwork.

For the past 12 years, Bastarache has been a client of Mainstream, which is dedicated to teaching life and employment skills to developmentally challenged adults to improve their quality of life and integration into the community. Bastarache, who has autism, is not only developmentally challenged but is also not able to hear.

But despite major communication barriers, Bastarache has flourished at the ReStore, volunteering twice a week for six hours a day. Because of his efforts, a lock which would have required the customer to pay for its refitting can now be sold for the price of a working device, thus earning more for Habitat for Humanity.

His skills have proven so valuable that two months ago the store purchased a \$900 lock and key tool set exclusively for him to use. Bastarache was supposed to receive a full day's training from Doug Pilliteri from Pinder's Lock and Security Co., where the lock was purchased. But after one demonstration, he was working on his own.



Bill Hutchison, the retail store manager, describes Bastarache as "brilliant" and said his hard work and focus is a huge asset to the store.

"In the areas he's good in, he's phenomenal," Hutchison said. "To me, Terry's not handicapped in any way."

Claire Cunningham is the workplace coordinator at Mainstream and meets Bastarache and a few other client volunteers at the store in the morning to help them set up for the day's work. But Bastarache gets there on his own, taking three buses to get to the Cushman Road location -- part of the life skill training Mainstream teaches.

Cunningham said Mainstream has arranged 10 volunteer placements, which are considered prestige positions for the clients. However, they're always looking for employers in order to set up more.

"Terry may be hearing impaired and developmentally challenged," Cunningham said. "Regardless, everybody shines in one area in their life. The employers we have right now are just elated with the help they're getting."

Kris Akilie, Mainstream's volunteer coordinator, said the centre tries hard to raise awareness among potential employers of the win-win nature of volunteer arrangements.

Not only do employers receive free labour, she said, but Mainstream's clients become more integrated, increase their self esteem and confidence and gain pride knowing they're contributing to the community.