



## COTEY'S STORY

For 12 years, Cotey has been part of KANDU's Prevocational Employment program, always working toward the goal of living independently. While Cotey searched for an apartment, KANDU provided daily living skills training in a specialized lab designed to emulate an apartment. Here, Cotey practiced essential tasks like cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping, budgeting, and responding to emergencies—all while waiting for a housing opportunity. With guidance from his instructor, Cotey developed skills that helped him thrive independently. Recently, his hard work paid off as he finally moved into a place of his own.

Cotey takes pride in his new home and is working hard to make it truly his own. He's been saving his paychecks to furnish and decorate, adding his own personal style. When he first moved in, he didn't have the furnishings to make his apartment feel like home. Cotey was determined to make it a comfortable space. He even took steps the first weekend of his move to organize boxes, begin to unpack, and do laundry before KANDU staff arrived to help, demonstrating his enthusiasm.

Adjusting to living alone does bring its challenges, including moments of loneliness. Cotey is learning to build connections outside of work, and KANDU staff is right by his side, helping him develop valuable social skills, from communication and self-presentation to personal safety. They also guide him in recognizing potential hazards, whether it's navigating friendships, avoiding harmful social situations, or becoming more familiar with his new neighborhood.

For Cotey, having choices and control over his life is something he values deeply, because for a long time his options were limited. And in some cases, Cotey is still overcoming barriers. Unlike most people, he can't just hop in a car to run errands or pick up groceries. Every trip to the store involves carefully navigating public transportation, which can take over an hour each way. With a tight budget, Cotey, with assistance from KANDU, works to meticulously calculate his purchases to stay within his food allowance, all while considering how much he can carry back on the bus. These everyday tasks, which many take for granted, require Cotey to invest significant time, energy, and planning. Despite these challenges, Cotey's determination and resourcefulness shines through as he finds ways to make his circumstances work.

Cotey's journey toward independence is marked by resilience, hard work, and a commitment to overcoming obstacles as program staff help him build the life, he envisions for himself—one step and one choice at a time