Curtis Family Moves Forward

When John and Lorraine Curtis’ son, Jarod, was born, the prognosis was not good. Doctors, as they sometimes do, gave them the worst-case scenario. As it turned out, Jarod was left only with short-term memory loss and a deformity in his joints. For whatever reason, he managed to avoid all the really bad possibilities of spinal meningitis.

He did have some struggles at school, and his parents decided to homeschool him. The whole process of Jarod growing up and moving on with his life has been a family affair. Both parents and son have had to learn new ways of doing things and adapt. As Lorraine said, “Because of the help from Freedom Resource Center, it’s made it a whole lot easier.”

One of Jarod’s challenges has been employment. He got a job at the Pizza Corner factory. They worked with him and treated him just like anyone else. He was trained to do anything on the production line. However, Pizza Corner was sold and the production facility shut down. Jarod was faced with finding new employment in a different type of industry.

They got in touch with vocational rehabilitation. Jarod had three or four different jobs, and eventually settled in at Menards in Jamestown. He moved in with his brother earlier this year at age 35. He also has a part-time dishwasher job at a local restaurant.

One of the challenges for John and Lorraine was to learn how to let go a little bit. They had to get used to waiting for Freedom Resource Center has closed the Moorhead office. For service information, contact the Fargo office 701-478-0459.

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Jarod Curtis

Jarod to come up with his own answers. They backed off on checking his bank account and let him do it himself. According to Lorraine, working with Beth from Freedom has been very timely and helpful. They have been able to work together to develop tools for the parents to better work with Jarod. The parents had to learn that they could also use some help, even though people in this part of the country pride themselves on their self-sufficiency.

Jarod attended the public listening session that Freedom held in Jamestown in September. His parents feel that for him to be able to participate and process the information is extremely gratifying. John jokes, “He’s really good looking. He looks like his father.” “Jarod loves being out helping people. That is what makes him most happy,” Lorraine said.

In his spare time, Jarod enjoys watching movies. He and Beth have worked on cooking and recipes, navigating his way through Jamestown, and looking for other social activities to participate in. He has attended Freedom In Action events that Freedom has held in Jamestown. “Independence says the whole thing! I am learning how to do things for myself and be independent,” Jarod said. “I enjoy the classes. My favorite was painting rocks. I made one for my brother, my mom and my uncle. It was neat to give them something.”

Things are going well in Jamestown thanks to his brother, his caring parents, his own self resolve, and just a little help from outside organizations.

From Where I Sit

In the Independent Living Movement, we often talk about integration. Supposedly it’s the best way to live, alongside everybody else. Here’s another take on that from my perspective.

Back when I started college, 40 years ago already, we had some segregation. A bunch of us guys who used wheelchairs all ended up living in the basement of West Hall at UND. It was an interesting place, because the football team also lived there. We didn’t have a whole lot of choice where to live. Our rooms were barely accessible, and I’m sure the rest of the floors were not accessible at all. There were two other dorms where a few people who used wheelchairs lived, also in the basement.

Overall, I didn’t mind this arrangement. Some of us had roommates, who were also our attendants. Some people had a roommate who also used a wheelchair. That was not even practical, as those rooms were fairly small. I often tell people that I learned more about living independently from those guys than I ever did in the rehab hospital.

After a few years, I started playing Quad Rugby. This was a segregated event. We did have able-bodied volunteers, as well as some friends and family who practiced and went on trips with us, but it was just for people with quadriplegia. Again, I think it was a good experience. Being on that team was every bit as competitive and fun as my high school football team had been. And, I had a lot more success than I did in high school.

I played some softball with HOPE, Inc. this summer. This program gives people with disabilities the opportunity to get into sports and recreation with their peers. No pressure, very supportive, and an overall fun experience.

It seems to me that in the 70s and 80s where we had limited choices of just a few colleges or places to live that we had more of a disability culture. People identified with each other, helped each other on an informal basis, and became friends. Now, there are many more choices of where to live or go to college.

I’m not saying I prefer segregation. What I am saying is that we need to figure out a way to still identify as people with disabilities, and help each other to live more independently in an integrated society. Having only one choice of where to live is like having no choice. I want to see people have a number of good options, just like anyone else. I want people with disabilities to be integrated and independent, but at the same time join us in our fight to make this a more inclusive country for all. We still have a lot of work to do.

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The Art of Freedom

Dayna Del Val, The Arts Partnership – Guest Speaker

Zach Christeson (1st Place)

Terese Rotenberger (2nd Place)

Kristine Harris (3rd Place)

Mark Peer shares his art with fellow artist
What’s Wrong With This Picture?

The mud covering the corner may not provide a firm, stable, slip resistant surface. The mud also covers the detectable warning surface (The yellow device with the bumps). The detectable warning is supposed to provide visual contrast and texture contrast. This curb ramp needs to be cleaned. The mud also indicates that water may pool here and that even after a rain event this corner could be filled with water. The irregularities between the curb ramp and the street also need to be repaired.