

AUGUST 2013

by Ian Miner, as told to Catie Wheeler, University of Alaska Anchorage, Center for Human Development

I attended school in Anchorage, Alaska, side by side with my twin sister. As a child, my seizure disorder and developmental disability were a huge concern for my family due to the high medical risk I faced on a daily basis. School was a great place to learn and grow, and while I did my best to be involved, the fog created by the seizures and anticonvulsant medications often interfered with my ability to make friends and access education and the community. My parents were strong advocates to get the services that I needed to be safe, including supervision by medical personnel to ensure my safety.

In 2010, I persevered through major brain surgery in order to gain control of the seizure disorder. I worked to relearn the basic tasks of daily living and adjust to this “new” body and mind. The surgery worked wonders, and soon after recovery I began to practice self-determination with the help of my family, educators, and support agency.

While in high school, I started a community service project growing plants in my school district’s career education center. We sold the plants to raise money for immigrant families in Anchorage. I worked with teachers, fellow students, and my family to make the event a success, and the community noticed. I was awarded the Great News Good Kids scholarship, a full-time four-year scholarship to the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). The award was a mixed blessing. This was a wonderful opportunity, but there was not a program available at UAA that met my educational needs.

In 2011, I participated in the development of a person-centered plan through the UAA Center for Human Development. As part of this process,



I identified life goals. One of my main goals was to attend college to learn more about the field of criminal justice. Through involvement in Youth Advocates Community (YAC), a group of students with and without disabilities who engage in social activities and service learning projects, I learned about a new unique educational opportunity: TAPESTRY.

TAPESTRY was developed by the UAA’s Center for Human Development. My family and I realized what a wonderful opportunity this program offered. I applied, and through a competitive application process, was accepted in the first group of students to enter the program in spring 2012.

The growth I experienced in this first semester was noticed by everyone in my life and was a testament to my ambition. Upon entering the program, I, with the support of my family, had assembled a strong wraparound support team. I had secured a Medicaid Waiver that provided me with care coordination, day habilitation, and supported employment services.

On my first day of classes I was excited, scared, and not sure if I could handle it. But during my first semester, I began learning skills I'll use for the rest of my life. I learned how to schedule my own team meetings, identify and request the accommodations I need to succeed, type with one hand, resolve conflicts with classmates, and take responsibility for my study time. Along with academic and employment skills, I also learned social skills that have made me more confident in forming new friendships and talking to mentors and professors. The confidence I gained was amazing.

My growth was evident to many people in my life. My friends and family shared that after my first two weeks on campus, I was "a new man." I stayed involved in YAC while at TAPESTRY, and the coordinator of the YAC program noticed that I used to talk about what my sister, mother, or friends were doing, and now I talk about what I'm doing. I even told my mom "thank you" because after scheduling my own planning meeting, I realized how hard she had to work to schedule all those other meetings I had before.

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Following my first semester, I began my first paid job with Nine Star Education and Employment Services: a paid internship at a local packing and post office franchise. I used a job coach through my Medicaid Waiver to learn the job and used the benefits analysis I received my first semester in TAPESTRY to report my work activity to Social Security. I worked 30 hours a week at \$8.50/hour

throughout the summer. I think I did a great job. I received a glowing letter of recommendation explaining how reliable, thoughtful, and hardworking I was.

I'm now taking classes and working part-time at a student job off-campus as a front desk receptionist. I work six hours a day, two days a week. I'm not working long hours because

I have to balance that job with doing homework and taking classes. My supports are working hard to keep up with my transition. I'm driving my team, and they're all doing their best to keep up with me.

Everyone tells me how proud they are of me, and I'm proud of myself too.

This article is reprinted with permission from the National Gateway to Self-Determination "Research to Practice in Self-Determination Series," Issue 6: The Impact of College on Self-Determination. The National Gateway to Self-Determination, a National Training Initiative on Self-Determination, is funded by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The entire "Research to Practice in Self-Determination" Series can be found at www.ngsd.org/everyone/research-practice-self-determination-issues.