
CENTER FOR DISABILITIES AND DEVELOPMENT

Possibilities in Education and Training

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For LeQuan Edwards, “Watching the Moss Grow” Is Not an Option

Mike Hoenig, Project Director, Conner Training Connection



LeQuan Edwards lives in an apartment in North Liberty-one which she found on her own while living in a nursing home against her will. She hopes to move to Des Moines very soon to be near her family, her doctor's office, and the grocery store. This all sounds unremarkable, until you throw in the circumstances which LeQuan has managed to overcome.

LeQuan's journey began over two years ago when a series of strokes left her with quadriplegia and a brain injury. Following a nursing home stay which resulted in burns to her legs due to a staff member placing her in an extremely hot shower, LeQuan was discharged to a hospital where she would spend nine months awaiting a placement.

“No one wanted to take me because I'm transgender,” she explained.

While in the hospital, LeQuan reached out to the media in the hopes of bringing to light the discrimination which she was facing. She was rewarded by an interview with a Des Moines area TV station which subsequently aired her story. Lindsey Robertson, a Money Follows the Person (MFP) program transition specialist, saw the interview and went to see LeQuan in the hospital. That initial contact eventually led to a life in the community free from abuse and neglect.

LeQuan would encounter many more bumps along that road to freedom. She would eventually be discharged from the hospital to an eastern Iowa nursing facility where she was to receive physical therapy. The nursing facility denied her access to physical and hormone therapy while giving her

additional medications which caused her to experience significant weight gain. The facility offered no help during LeQuan's community transition.

"Lindsey Robertson stayed in touch with me when I went to the nursing home," LeQuan told me. "I told her I wanted out of there, and she stuck up for me. She really stuck her neck out for me at a staffing in November (of 2016). Thanks to Lindsey, I was able to move to my apartment in North Liberty on January 8, 2018. I'm getting my hormone therapy again, and my doctor says I'm doing remarkably well!"

LeQuan's year of eligibility with MFP, a federal program which supports Medicaid recipients to transition from congregate to community settings, began on her move date. "The Program has been a God-send," LeQuan says emphatically. "Lindsey used funds to pay my apartment deposit, buy furniture, and get groceries. Both Lindsey and Julie Adams, my new transition specialist, have gone way above and beyond the call of duty!"

LeQuan anxiously awaits her move to the Des Moines apartment which she located on her own. "I've done all the research myself," she said proudly. "I don't believe in letting moss grow around me! I lined up a new doctor, and my new apartment will be right across the street from his office. It'll also be close to the grocery store. Now I just need a hand up, not a hand out, to get there."

That "hand up" will likely come from Julie Adams and the MFP program. "They all treat me like a human being, and they know this move is what I want," commented LeQuan.

Video Beat: Alive and Well...in the DRL



Intelligent Lives. Dir. Dan Habib. Feat. Micah Fialka-Feldman, Naomie Monplaisir, and Naieer Shaheed. Narr. Chris Cooper. LikeRightNow Films, 2018. DVD.

Once in a decade, a film reminds you of what the disability movement is all about – how far we have come and how much remains on the agenda to attain full, inclusive lives. *Intelligent Lives* is that film. It begins with the premise that 49 of 50 American states still subject students identified with intellectual disabilities to intelligence quotient (IQ) testing for educational placement. (Iowa is the *exception*.) One's

IQ, as it turns out, is not a predictor of the elasticity and power of the human brain to perceive, engage others, and create over time. Yet IQ segregation sustained its hold on societal divide through much of the early twentieth century, where children were relinquished to institutions initially for their care and then into adulthood for their keeping. It was only in 1947 that the Parent Movement arose to fight for human dignity in state custody, and later, to bring the children home to be raised in the community. Over the next decades various disability movements would coalesce, culminating in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, by which the civil rights of people with disabilities were protected by law. Section 504 of the Act is an anti-discrimination statute that requires the

needs of students with disabilities to be met at an equivalent level to those without special needs. Soon thereafter, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 ensured that students with disabilities had the same right to education as students without disabilities. A set of amendments to strengthen this law resulted in the renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA). IDEA followed closely on the heels of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

Today, families, educators, and evidence-based transition programs are leading the way for youth and young adults with disabilities to live inclusively in the community. *Intelligent Lives* illuminates three young adults on the cusp of dramatic transition. For Naieer, a high school student who is artistically talented and autistic, painting is a means to a career in the arts with the proper supports and services at hand.

Naomie is a young woman with Down syndrome who has been marginalized in a sheltered workshop. While working with her, a team of transition specialists discover her interest in a beauty career. With a bevy of contacts, Naomie's team helps her transition to a paid shop aide position in a beauty salon. Naomie's sparkling personality shines through at work, to the joy of her brother – her primary support advocate – and to her parents.

Finally, Micah Fialka-Feldman, who will honestly tell you that his IQ is 40, is over the moon to be a college graduate with a non-degree certificate in Education. This confident, well-spoken young man is a self-advocate, a friend without boundaries, a teaching assistant at Syracuse University, an outreach coordinator, and a national speaker. His life has been anchored by a supportive family who has given him the opportunity to nurture his innate curiosity. Micah defined his path and lives it, a lesson for everyone watching this singular film: *Intelligent Lives*.



Born This Way. Season 1. (Television program Classroom ed.) Prod. Jon Murray, Gil Goldschein, Laura Korkoian ... Elaine Frontain Bryant. Arts and Entertainment Network, 2016. DVD.

“Born This Way offers an intimate look into the lives of seven young California men and women born with Down syndrome, along with their families and friends. Cameras follow the men and women as they pursue their passions and lifelong dreams, explore friendships, romantic relationships, and work, all while defying society’s expectations.”

The contents of Season 1 include episodes entitled: “Up Syndrome”, “What’s Normal?”, “Dream Makers”, “Love and Chromosomes”, “Fears and Gears”, and “Don’t Limit Me.”

This A&E classroom edition of the EMMY®-winning series includes bonus interactive assessment activities to reinforce key themes in the full and vibrant lives of the *Born This Way* cast. The package includes Public Performance Rights (for classroom/educational use only) and a downloadable educator’s guide.



Thank You, Mary! *By Mike Hoenig*

For the past 20 years, *Possibilities* readers have learned about a plethora of topics through our DRL (Disability Resource Library) column. It's creative author, Mary Hubbard, has come up with a fresh theme for each issue which makes me want to run right down to the DRL and check out each selection! During that same time period, Mary has skillfully managed our disabilitytraining.org calendar, ensuring that visitors learn about state-of-the-art disability-related conferences, meetings and webinars.

Mary will retire from her position as Disability Resource Librarian at the UI Center for Disabilities and Development on February 1. Please join me in thanking Mary for her dedication and hard work on behalf of the Conner Training Connection.

"I don't need easy. I just need possible."

– *Bethany Hamilton-Dirks*

(American professional surfer who survived a 2003 shark attack in which her left arm was bitten off but who ultimately returned to-and was victorious in-professional surfing.)

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