

Possibilities

in Education and Training

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Celebrating Community Living: Mikey's Journey to Independence

by Michelle Johnston, Program Coordinator, Center for Disabilities and Development



Michael "Mikey" Howell's journey to independent living is a testament to the power of community support, perseverance, and the right resources. Mikey was initially offered placement at Systems Unlimited in Monticello. However, it wasn't the right fit for him. With the support of dedicated providers, he found a home that truly suits his needs.

Today, Mikey thrives in his new community, sharing his home with three roommates. He enjoys a variety of activities, such as visiting the pool and the park. One of his favorite pastimes is dining out, and Applebee's holds a special place in his heart. As a well-known regular, Mikey often receives extra perks from the staff who adore him. Shopping is another passion of his, and he can frequently be found browsing the aisles of Walmart, Dollar Tree, Dollar General, and Hy-Vee.

When asked what he enjoys most about living in the community, Mikey highlights the freedom to make his own choices—whether it's deciding how to spend his day or selecting his favorite stores and restaurants.

Transitioning to community living can come with uncertainties, but Mikey's experience

Mikey's Journey to Independence



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provides valuable insights. Many providers and teachers initially worried about whether community living was the right choice for Mikey. However, Jodie Schmitt with the Money Follows the Person (MFP) program helped demonstrate that there was no reason not to explore it. The MFP program offers eligible Medicaid recipients funding for the transition services and additional supports required during the first year of community living. Both MFP and Systems Unlimited played crucial roles in fostering open communication and ensuring a successful transition.

Kristin, Mikey's guardian, stresses the value of thorough preparation before making the move. She advises caregivers and providers to take their time, anticipate challenges, and remain resilient. "There will be mistakes, but you learn from them. Don't give up!" she encourages.

Having resources like MFP and Systems Unlimited made a significant difference. Their commitment to Mikey's success ensured that even difficult conversations were approached with determination and care.

Mikey's clinical team worked diligently to ease his transition. They created a picture book featuring images of staff, roommates, and his personal belongings. They also guided Mikey in understanding personal boundaries and the choices available to him.

Kristin proudly acknowledges how fortunate Mikey is to have such a dedicated team. "We truly found the best staff for him—it was serendipitous!" she exclaims.

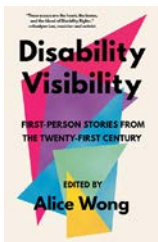
Mikey's story is an inspiring example of how the right environment, dedicated professionals, and supportive programs can make all the difference. His journey proves that with patience, communication, and the right resources, individuals can flourish in a community setting, making their own choices and embracing independence.

Disability Awareness Month Books

Mitch DeFauw, *Disability Resource Librarian*

In recognition of March and Disability Awareness Month, the disability resource library would like to share the following books which highlight the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities within community life and recognize their accomplishments across the lifespan. Each book is available for check out at the DRL.

For more questions about the DRL and its collection, you may contact the librarian through email at mitchell-defauw@uiowa.edu or by phone 319-356-1345. To further explore the collection, please visit uichildrens.org/drl-catalog.



Disability Visibility by Alice Wong

Activist Alice Wong brings together a collection of personal essays by contemporary writers who live with disabilities in *Disability Visibility*.

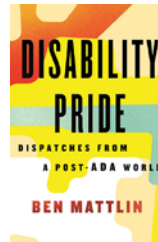
Taken together, this anthology gives a glimpse of the disability experience, highlighting the passions, talents, and everyday lives of this community. It invites readers to question their own assumptions and understandings. It celebrates and documents disability culture in the now. It looks to the future and past with hope and love.



Laughing at My Nightmare

by Shane Burcaw

With wit and a hilarious voice, Shane Burcaw's *Laughing at My Nightmare*, describes the challenges he faces as a twenty-one-year-old with spinal muscular atrophy. Shane handles his situation with humor and a "you-only-live-once" perspective on life. While he does talk about everyday issues that are relatable to teens, he also offers an eye-opening perspective on what it is like to have a life-threatening disease.



Disability Pride by Ben Mattlin

In *Disability Pride*, Ben Mattlin, a journalist living with a disability weaves together interviews and reportage to introduce individuals, ideas, and events in engaging, fast-paced prose. He traces the generation that came of age after the ADA reshaped America, and how it is influencing the future. Beautifully written, without anger or pity, *Disability Pride* is a revealing account of an often misunderstood movement and identity, an inclusive reexamination of society's treatment of those it deems different.



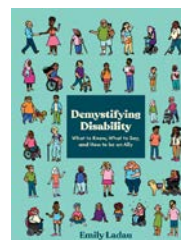
Just Ask by Sonia Sotomayor

In *Just Ask*, Sonia Sotomayor celebrates the different abilities kids (and people of all ages) have. Using her own experience as a child who was diagnosed with diabetes, Sotomayor writes about children with all sorts of challenges-- and looks at the special powers those kids have as well. As the kids work together to build a community garden, asking questions of each other along the way, this book encourages readers to do the same.



Unbroken: 13 Stories About Disabled Teens by Marieke Nijkamp

This anthology explores disability in fictional tales told from the viewpoint of characters with disabilities, written by creators with disabilities. *Unbroken* will offer today's teen readers a glimpse into the lives of people with disabilities in the past, present, and future.



Demystifying Disability by Emily Ladau

People with disabilities are the world's largest minority, an estimated 15 percent of the global population. But many of us—with or without a disability—do not know how to act, what to say, or how to be an ally to the disability community. What are the appropriate ways to think, talk, and ask about disability? *Demystifying Disability* is a friendly handbook on the important disability issues you need to know about.

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Positive thinking is more than just a tagline. It changes the way we behave. And I firmly believe that when I am positive, it not only makes me better, but it also makes those around me better.
-Harvey Mackay

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