

Jimmy's Story

Submitted by Erin Wadsworth, VR Counselor, Area 23 Richmond



On February 7, 1994, Mariann Albers finished her shift at Walmart and was heading to her mother's to pick up her middle son, James (Jimmy). Mariann was 7 ½ months pregnant and had an older daughter in addition to Jimmy. Jimmy was 2 years old and spent his time at his grandmother's when his mother worked. Mariann was so excited because she had purchased an Indianapolis Colts coat for Jimmy. She knew how surprised and happy he would be when he saw his unexpected gift. Even though Jimmy was only 2, he already loved football, especially the Indianapolis Colts.

Mariann arrived and parked across the street. Typically, she parked in the drive-way, but on this particular day, there was no available space due to company at her mother's.

With the Colts' coat in hand, she walked in and gave Jimmy his surprise. As expected, he was so happy and excited that he rushed to put it on. Mariann proceeded to take a seat and relax from a long day of working. Even though Mariann had sat down, Jimmy was ready to go with his new coat. With all the excitement, he bolted out the front storm door and straight for his mother's vehicle. Before his mother could get up from her seat and make it out the door to get him, he was already in the street and had been struck by a vehicle.

Mariann recalls her son laying in the middle of the road, balled up. A neighbor immediately called 911 and another neighbor who happened to work at the fire department as a firefighter, instructed Mariann to put him down. In a panic, she had picked him up, but then followed instructions and placed him in the grass in between the street and the sidewalk. The firefighter began to perform the necessary medical attention Jimmy needed until the Emergency Medical Team arrived. Mariann witnessed an EMT cutting off her baby's new Colts' coat and thought to herself, in the midst of the tragedy, how disappointed and sad Jimmy would be once he realized his coat was ruined.

Jimmy was rushed to Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis via Lifeline. Jimmy's condition was dire and the nurses and doctors could not tell his mother for almost a month if her son was going to survive the accident. He was put into a medically induced coma for 26 days. During this time, they were making all effort to relieve his brain from the swelling. After they were able to do so, they brought him out of the coma. Jimmy was put in a full body cast for nine weeks, his spleen had ruptured in three places, his growth plate was broken in his leg, and due to the head

trauma, he had to undergo a craniectomy. This neurosurgical procedure was performed to relieve pressure from his brain swelling and involves removing a small section of the skull. Due to internal bleeding from the accident, he also had to have multiple blood transfusions. On March 11, Jimmy spent his third birthday in a hospital bed.

Fast forward to 2016. Jimmy, now 25 years old, was uncertain what his future would hold. Due to the accident, he suffered a TBI which impacted his memory, cognitive ability and attention. In addition, he also experienced spasticity in the arm and leg. Both hemispheres were damaged so the long term, permanent damage left him with learning and motor impairments.

Having graduated with a certificate from high school and minimal vocational experience, Jimmy was spending his time alone in a small cottage behind his parents' home. He lived in Connersville, Indiana and his mother, Mariann, who is now a LPN, was desperate to help him find resources to assist him in starting his own life and independence. She was at a loss at what she could do to help him on his way towards these goals and saw him slowly declining physically and mentally because of the isolation. Jimmy did not have friends, did not know what he was capable of vocationally, and no one was sure if Jimmy could work independently. Mariann did not want this for her son, she knew Jimmy needed more from life and he was here for a reason. Mariann reminds me on a regular basis that her son did not survive that accident to just waste away and not have a purpose in life.

March 22, 2016, I had the pleasure of meeting Mariann and her son, Jimmy, for a Vocational Rehabilitation application. She told me Jimmy's story and, of course, my heart broke for him. She was determined to help her son progress and gain independence. From that point, Jimmy applied for services and I discussed our program. I just happened to attend a meeting introducing the new Erskine Green Training program the week prior. I felt like I went to that meeting about Erskine Green because fate had it that I would be meeting Jimmy. I assisted Jimmy in applying for the program and he attended an informational presentation on site along with myself and his mother. Jimmy was accepted into the program and attended the Host/Server Assistant course training. Starting July 11 through September 10, Jimmy participated in and excelled in the training. He made friends, connected with others, his depression disappeared and he enjoyed his new found freedom. Jimmy was offered a job at Three Wise Men before graduating as he had been training there for his vocational goal. I worked closely with Erskine Green, Jimmy, Mariann and VR staff in also assisting him with finding his own place to live. Jimmy was ready to be his own independent person. Erskine Green was his spring-board for his confidence and knowledge he needed to start his own life.

Today, you can find Jimmy greeting you at Three Wise Men in Muncie. He works there part-time as a host, and every time I go to visit or have a meeting, he sells me everything on the menu. He not only loves his job, but he has passion for it. Jimmy has talent and I have never heard him mention or use his disability as a barrier or an excuse as to why he couldn't accomplish any goal. He loves to cook, loves his new found social life, has exceeded

expectations as an independent adult, and, on a side note, can sing like an angel. Jimmy wasn't supposed to stay in that apartment isolated in rural Connersville. His family and I believe that his story of succeeding and accomplishing bigger, better things is far from over. Vocational Rehabilitation paved the way to his successes, but without Jimmy and his efforts, he would've never accomplished and achieved what he has today. I will miss this family once the case is closed and it is almost time to start our farewells. I will always look to Jimmy's story for inspiration.

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