



# Youth Workshops Focused on Independence = Joel's SUCCESS

By Raquel Castaneda

Families Helping Families has been doing a lot of great youth-centered workshops and training. The workshops are centered around topics that a focus group, of young adults with disabilities, expressed they needed. One topic was about eating healthy. The Healthy Choices workshops were done as a series of six different events and was presented by LSU AgCenter. My sister and I brought our brother Joel, pictured above in the center wearing the cheesy hat.

At first, I questioned what my brother would learn or if he would even participate if he attended these workshops. Joel is nonverbal but tries his best to communicate. On the most part, only our family and close friends understand him when he speaks. At times others may pick up on what he is saying, but it can be frustrating for both parties. So he normally doesn't try to speak in front of strangers.

We decided to bring him to the youth workshops anyway. We thought it wouldn't do any harm and it is something productive to get him out of the house. It turned out to be such a great experience for him.

Joel was very engaged while participating in the workshops. When presented with questions by the facilitator he would answer eagerly. The facilitator may not have understood everything he said, but I knew that not only was he learning he was excited about it. To our surprise, he actively participated and became more talkative during the process. Joel has come out of his shell and has attended every single youth workshop. They have been a great experience for Joel and our family.

So far we've attended transitioning to adult health care, healthy foods, physical activity, stretching your food \$, self-advocacy, transitioning into employment,

navigating the internet safely, and how to ride the public bus.

Joel had a blast learning how to ride the bus. I took a picture of my sister Maryury and Joel getting off the bus. When I checked to see if I got a good shot I noticed the word **possible** written on the side of the bus. I smiled knowing that it is **possible** for my brother and other individuals with a disability to become more and more independent .

We sincerely appreciate Families Helping Families for providing these workshops and look forward to future opportunities to learn and grow.



Joel and my sister Maryury at “How to Ride a Public Bus” workshop. When I checked the picture to see if I got a good shot I noticed the word possible written on the side of the bus.



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