

“We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.

John F Kennedy

When I was asked to start the new Community Based Day Program for Progress Unlimited, I heard “Day Program” and immediately said yes because that’s been all I’ve done my entire adult life. Then the “Community Based” part started sinking in and my 38 + years of sheltered work started choking me up. But if nothing else, I am determined. My first young lady, Meghan, while challenging due to her need for social skills training, had amazing computer skills. It was easy to identify her pathway to employment. I was also blessed with the most amazing staff person whose niche was development. So, Meghan’s week of experiences in her desired field of data entry filled up quickly. Zach was a much different story.

Zach was in our Medical Day Program. He spent most of each day walking the hallways wearing a blue helmet in case he had a seizure. He would often come in to visit me and look out the front windows, tapping on them with his fingers. I thought he looked as though he was trying to imagine the feeling of being on the outside of that window. One day the Director of Support Services, Lisa Cloud asked me if I would consider having Zach in my program. I said “sure”, half joking. Lisa was not joking. The more I watched Zach walking through the halls, the more I felt Zach belonged in my program. So, armed with an amazing staff member, support of Zach’s parents and Progress Unlimited, Zach was my second. Knowing from his team that he loved being “on the move” and swimming. I got him a membership to the Randallstown Y. The one thing I would never allow though is just “hanging out” someplace to kill time. Then just the week before he was to start, I was introduced to a staff person looking for some daytime hours. This young man loved to swim and play soccer. Zach’s first day, I planned for him to start at the Y swimming. Joel got him ready and I was going in the pool with him. Zach looked at the pool, smiled, took two cautious steps into the water and jumped from there. He began spinning and spinning then surfaced with the biggest smile on his face. Zach doesn’t communicate verbally, but he definitely communicates! Now, his schedule is three days a week swimming in the morning and playing soccer in the afternoon with Joel. The other two include volunteering with Meals on Wheels learning to hand the food tray to the recipient and finding the other environments that make him smile!

This is the hardest thing I have ever done in my many years working with adults, but it is absolutely the right thing to do.

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P.S. Zach no longer wears the blue helmet and he dribbled the soccer ball for a full five feet today! Oh Yeah!!

