

An Exciting Trajectory

Jordan Wimberly is a kind person, whose soft-spoken nature, belies a keen intelligence and gentle spirit. These qualities have allowed her to move beyond several obstacles in her life. Whether they be epilepsy, or a sports related injury, like the one she recently sustained to her knee, she has progressed through them and used the experiences to boost her strengths. Her ability to survive has taught her great empathy, which she now passes on to the children she helps educate at Summit Center of WNY.

Summit is a school dedicated to helping people with autism navigate life—from early intervention to adulthood—no matter what direction their lives take them. It is a tremendous resource for individuals, as well as parents, families, and caregivers. It assists with education, job development, teaching life skills, and helping foster independence. It gives everyone the tools to live the meaningful life that they desire.

Jordan loves her job at Summit and finds great satisfaction in her work. “It’s honestly been life changing” she shares with a grin; her passion and her enthusiasm are evident. Jordan works as a classroom aide in a class including children ages 6 to 9. She helps with whatever tasks they need assistance with, working around 40 hours a week.

Jordan has an epilepsy diagnosis, which was easier for her to manage during childhood rather than adulthood. The risk of seizures made it impossible for her to drive a car and cautious about operating machinery. Being unable to travel without assistance has limited her independence, compromising job opportunities, social interactions, and friendships in her life. In addition, there is a logistical time element that is wasted. Jordan often needs extra time to rely on public transport or arrange a carpool. She states that social isolation has taken a toll on her psyche, and left an opening for loneliness and depression to seep in.

There was a time when she was in a deep state of depression. Frustrated and in pain, and just struggling to find a way forward. Luckily, Jordan is blessed with a supportive family especially her sister, Devon, and her best friend, Bella. They began doing small activities together and slowly helped Jordan rise out of her depression.

On the physical level, Jordan ran track in high school, where an injury in a hurdling event resulted in a torn ACL that required surgery. Recently, this old injury led to a new knee problem with her meniscus. This complicated her job search, as she was on partial bed rest, and then crutches for several months. This delayed her original start date with Andrea.

Despite quite a few obstacles, Jordan’s job search with Andrea went quickly. Andrea worked her magic to summon up a polished resume, and helped Jordan prepare for in-person interviews. The mass distribution proved fruitful. Jordan was given several promising interviews almost immediately. She recently graduated with her B.S. in Psychology from UB, in pursuit of her desire to help others. These were the main criteria for her finding work.

“In my wildest dreams I never knew that I would work with kids.” But here Jordan is doing just that and enjoying it deeply. It’s very rewarding work and she has enjoyed making a difference in

their lives every day. At Summit, she has terrific coworkers and even another person with epilepsy who has a similar life experience—sharing notes, as it were—creating a common bond.

The job isn't without its challenges. The children can suddenly display behavioral issues, even physical aggression. Therefore, it takes someone with fortitude and boundless amounts of patience and kindness to remain calm and handle the situation. Jordan possesses all of these qualities in abundance.

Jordan would like to ultimately earn her master's degree and pursue the counseling field. Also, she has almost reached the eighteen-month, seizure free threshold that would allow her to sit for a driver's test and earn her license. She states that this will open a vast network of experiences that have to this point been denied to her.

"Innovative Placements has opened a larger world for me." Jordan says with a tone of accomplishment. She is pleased with the services and happy with the successful yield that working with Andrea Todaro produced. "It gives people with disabilities that chance to exist more completely in the world around them." Jordan would recommend this program to anyone struggling with depression, chronic illness, or disability. It has given Jordan an outlet for her natural talents and is a steppingstone that will launch her to even greater heights, and a level of success in her career, without a ceiling to hold her down. Working at Summit allows her a similar platform, to help provide the kids in her care with a chance at a life filled with endless opportunity.

Martin Kilroy, Writer, Innovative Placements