

Community Program PINs Messages of Independence and Reassurance



David Miller, pictured in Rittenhouse Square, enjoys his independence as a result of the PIN Program and its proximity to our region's cultural and entertainment attractions.

One night last month, David Miller, 29, from Narberth, spent the evening with his friends at Xfinity Live, watching the games. After a short train ride to his apartment, he tidied up his home and went to bed.

The fact that there's nothing remarkable about David's evening underscores the strength of the support systems that have grown around his co-ed community of young, twenty-something adults here in Narberth. The injury that David Miller sustained as an infant is a fact that alters not his destination in life, but merely the course it takes. And for the Philadelphia Independence Network (PIN), operated by JEVS Human Services, David's independent quest to navigate life is exactly the goal.

"I was one of the first four members of PIN," David says matter-of-factly, as he recounts his tale from the night before over a downtown lunch. "It's made me more social, brought me new friends and given me freedom."

That freedom, the yearning of every young adult to stretch their wings and find a job, a home – and maybe even a partner – is at the core mission of PIN, now in its third year of operation. Coordinated and run by JEVS Human Services, PIN provides both life and socialization skills and a 24/7 emergency backstop to young adults living with disabilities. Its 16 co-ed members live in their own apartments (with or without roommates), obtain employment, go to school and/or volunteer, and manage every aspect of their own lives with limited-but-as-needed support – from cooking to budgeting and laundry.

"At its genesis, PIN was developed without any preconceived notions of what limits exist for these young adults," said Jerry Miller, David's father and JEVS Human Services Board of Directors member. "Members are carving out a useful, productive life despite challenges in a welcoming, community atmosphere that includes program staff, families, the members themselves and the town of Narberth."

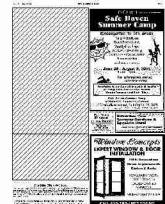
With its walkable community, recreational activity and excellent transportation system, the town itself has become an essential part of the program's success. Each of the program's participants are able to take advantage of local shops and restaurants, travel into Philadelphia or parts beyond, and serve as part of the local fabric of the town, through employment or community activities. Within the program, members enjoy periodic dinners together at the program's clubhouse, sports tournaments and movie nights—while learning valuable communication and life skills.

According to PIN Program Director Marnisha Henry, successes of the program have been too numerous to count.

"Our member families generally come to us looking to answer the larger questions, such as 'Will my young adult be independent?' and 'What's going to happen when I'm gone?'" said Henry. "To see members develop their own space in the community helps our families feel secure."

Lois Frischling, David's mother, agrees.

"It can be complicated and frustrating to find the right setting for young adults to grow," she noted. Two of the founding members of New York's POINT Program – PIN's inspiration – Lois and Jerry envision PIN as a regional program that avoids a group home existence and



provides “substantive, real-life experience to complement classwork.”

Those real-life experiences are collaborative by design, according to Henry. Through a partnership with the Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation, students are learning about personal finance. Through JEVS Human Services, students are enrolled at other JEVS programs, including Orleans Technical Institute, a vo-technical trades school and Culinary Connections, a food-preparation course. Participants then share what they’ve learned with each other – meal preparation, for example.

Seeing the members explore their own diverse interests is at the core of PIN – and of JEVS’ overall mission, according to Jerry Miller.

“At JEVS, the goal is to strengthen communities by helping everyone achieve their individual highest quality of life,” he said. “PIN allows our family to have the same hopes and dreams for David that we do for his two brothers – that each continues to become a contributing member of society, all along their independent courses.”

David, for his part, is not letting grass grow under his feet. An avid ice hockey player, he’s been applying to jobs and hopes to attend Delaware County Community College this fall to work toward obtaining his Child Development Associate credentials, in part to pass on his infectious enthusiasm and collaborative skills.

“PIN has granted me a number of skills and a new group of friends to do things with,” he said. “Now I’m free to help others be active and have fun.”

The Philadelphia Independence Network accepts applications from young adults with disabilities who are at least 21 years old and have demonstrated the potential to live independently. Families are responsible for arranging housing; a fee for services does apply. Call 267-350-8678 or email pin@jevs.org for more information.