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What it Means to be Independent!

by Josh

I joined Philadelphia Independence Network (PIN) about 4 months ago and since then I feel good about being more independent and being responsible for my actions. I am used to my parents doing things for me and paying my bills. Once I joined PIN and moved into my own apartment with a roommate, I realized there is more to living on your own than just paying rent. While I was in college I lived in an apartment, but I had my meals in the dining hall and my parents paid my bills. I see now how much more there is to taking care of yourself. The types of challenges that I have to face are learning to pay bills which takes multiple steps and shopping for food, which is not as easy as I thought.



Josh in his apartment with Adam, his apartment mate.

Independence means: I have to pay electric and cable, I have to get and pay for food, I have to clean my apartment, and I have to be considerate of my roommate. Even though my parents are five minutes away, I want to feel that I can be independent while living with a roommate. I have grown as a person in this program. I feel I can be independent and still have backup. I am learning to wake up myself and get to places on time. I take public transportation everywhere and have learned to budget my time. The best part with living on your own is that there are no parental controls. You need to make choices for yourself. It feels good not having my parents telling me what to do and not to do because I feel more like an adult now. I feel more responsible for myself because I am living on my own with a roommate.

Also, being in the PIN group allows me to socialize with people that have something in common. I am making more friends now than I did during high school and college. One of the things I like about PIN is that they do not judge me or say you can't be part of this group once you are in. When I need something I usually call Marnisha and/or Katie, the director and manager of PIN and they help me figure it out. Also, if I need advice or need help with something I can call my fellow PIN



Josh enjoying game night with a few of his friends

members. PIN is also helping me to find a job. If PIN were not around, I would not be having as much fun and would probably be bored a lot. I do not know where I will be in five years. I take one day at a time to keep myself together. PIN will always be a part of me. Whether or not I am still in the group, I will keep in contact with my friends. I would give a person with a disability the advice to live life to fullest everyday because you never know what could happen next.

One Really Big Step!

Our Son Sean by Kathy & George

Coming to PIN was probably the biggest and most significant decision in Sean's life. It was Sean who came to us and said he was ready to move out and live on his own and he was going to live with his girlfriend. As you might imagine, I was speechless and then concerned. I will say that Sean tried to relieve my fears by telling me he and Elyse wanted to go to the PIN program. We had heard of the program and had gone to their presentation at his school but just filed it away thinking PIN was three hours away. I never considered Sean moving such a long way from home. This didn't seem to bother him. He was going to be with his girlfriend. He was very motivated to pursue finding out about the PIN program. Both young adults attended the PIN open house in January 2013. After talking with Sean about his visit and then talking with Marnisha, I felt relieved. Finally, here was a program that would allow young adults such as Sean and Elyse to have a chance at what any other young adult wants – freedom to be on their own, be independent and pursue a relationship. PIN has the flexibility and commitment to meet the needs and wants of young adults like Sean - to create an environment where young adults can pursue their dreams and still have a safety net when needed. We felt as parents that Sean deserved the same opportunity for independence as other young adults his age, and PIN would give him the opportunity.

Living on your own is a big event but living with your girlfriend is a huge event. I wasn't sure how this would all work out. We are happy to say it has worked out better than we could have ever imagined. Yes, there have been some rocky spots. You really get to know a person when you live with them. PIN is helping them both learn the art of compromise and how to be supportive of each other while maintaining mutual responsibility in their relationship.

A couple of weeks ago I asked Sean if he was homesick – for Connecticut and us? His response says it all – about his living situation, the PIN program and his relationships – “Mom this is my home.”

Our Daughter Elyse by Stephen

Elyse's mother and I had spent the last year she was in the VIP Program on Long Island trying to determine where she would live once she graduated. We had attended the PIN presentation (the program was just starting) and liked what we heard, but were looking (unsuccessfully, as it turned out) for something similar closer to us (DC area).

But when Elyse announced upon graduating from VIP that she intended to live with her boyfriend Sean once he graduated, we knew we needed to switch gears. Elyse was going to be living with me for the next year, so we began researching alternatives.

It quickly became apparent that Philadelphia was ideal in terms of being the closest thing to a midpoint between the two families (Connecticut and DC), so we started taking a closer look at PIN. Everything we found out was positive. We spoke with Sean's parents, and then I took both Elyse and Sean to the January PIN Open House. They appeared to mesh with the existing members very well. And it was clear that Marnisha had a pretty good handle on the existing personalities and interactions.

On the face of it, the situation was perfect. A community of young adults, with similar challenges, living independently yet with a safety net, completely integrated into the community, each making the same daily choices, dealing with the same responsibilities, required of any other young adult. It seemed exactly what was required in order for them to grow and lead lives largely indistinguishable from those around them.

Once everyone decided to commit, it was time to wrestle with our feelings over the whole thing. This was an even bigger step than when we had sent Elyse to VIP. That was for three years. This was for the foreseeable future. It was also a big step for PIN, as Sean and Elyse were going to be the first members entering the program as a “couple.” Would their relationship be at all disruptive to the existing PIN dynamics?



PIN members Sean and Elyse sharing some leisure time.

And it was 150 miles away! No dropping what I was doing and hopping in the car to pop over and take care of any little problem that came up! And on top of acclimating to PIN, Sean and Elyse were going to be negotiating all the pitfalls of an adult relationship, the ups and downs of living with someone day in and day out.

Sometimes you just have to let go, and trust that your child will do no worse than to make the same mistakes you did at his or her

age. Thus far things have worked out better than we would have expected. Sean and Elyse have learned the art of negotiation and compromise, with each other and with the other PIN members. They apparently have integrated into the PIN community well. Recently I asked Elyse if she was happy with the decisions we had all made. She said, "Of course! I'm where I want to be, and I'm with Sean. I'm happy." She just wants her dog. We're still discussing that one!

What Will We Do Next?

by *Hermine*



Josh celebrating his college graduation with his mom, dad, sister and grandmother

“What will we do next?” is the question all parents ask when their children and young adults are transitioning in life. However, for parents of special needs children and young adults this question is ongoing. As soon as we find a place for our child, we are looking for the next transition when this place is no longer a good fit. I always worry about a future without us and will they be “okay”. Can they live independently and manage their budget, their meals, their job, their health, and will they be able to zig and zag the obstacles of life.

Our son lived independently on his college campus in Florida but within a confined area with lots of supports. Most meals were provided and he did not have any budget worries because he was still on the mommy/daddy plan. He had to learn to navigate the world of airports and security and managed this in spite of my hovering and worrying. We were concerned about him

returning home. Living with us would be a step backward, but living on his own in suburban Philadelphia was a scary thought for us (not him). I was fortunate to have stumbled on the PIN program during a conference I attended in the spring of Josh’s junior year at college. I immediately knew, this would be the perfect way to transition Josh to community independent living and removed all my fears.

He met with the group and the director, Marnisha, on several occasions and finally agreed this would be a good fit. He joined the group this past July and moved into his own apartment in August. From the very beginning of this process, he would contact Marnisha for advice. I found it quite helpful, since the advice from parents is often shunned even though it is the same advice offered from an objective party. Marnisha would talk with him, help him think through what he wanted and help him set realistic expectations and discover the best way to accomplish his goal. With this support Josh is making good choices and listening to council with an open mind. We are all gaining confidence that he is appropriately moving along the path to independence.

Even though we live near him, Josh enjoys telling us that he is busy with his friends and will call us or see us later. He has taken responsibility for monitoring his bank account, paying his rent, phone bill and electric bill. He uses the bus and train system alone and even remembers to check-in and let us know he is safe. Each day we are amazed at his growth and acceptance of responsibility. We knew he had the ability and PIN has helped him to make the transition. PIN has also helped us to let go and allow him to spread his wings.

This is the first time that I am not asking the question “What is next?”



Our PIN member trip to Dorney Park



PIN members and families at our annual PIN picnic



Some PIN members enjoying game night

Celebrating Our 2nd Year Anniversary...

PIN started a new chapter in my life. It opened my social life, helping me make new friends and have activities. I can hang out with people who are my friends, and who I consider my family because they are there for me and I trust them. I am becoming a more independent and responsible adult.

– **Adam**, a founding PIN member

PIN is the product of what is known as a “shared vision.” In designing a shared vision the fundamental question is ‘what do we want to create together?’ Together... parents, members, and JEVS have created a community that embodies a collaborative approach in reaching our mutual goals. In fact, it is the interdependence we share that greatly contributes to the individual successes of the members’ independence. Together we evolve!

– **Marnisha Henry**, PIN Director

As founding parents of PIN we often remark on the transformation the program has experienced since its inception 2 years ago. The maturation of the program, and more importantly the members, can best be expressed in four ways:

- The way in which members have grown in their ability to express themselves, to agree and disagree with others, to build and maintain friendships, to independently organize social activities and to speak in front of a group.
- The welcoming nature of the Narberth community from the Borough’s Manager, to the business community and the neighbors. PIN has become an important and responsible community member.
- The program’s growing presence and recognition in the Delaware Valley, positioning PIN to be a premier regional program.
- The indomitable spirit of the families to make the program, not just their own children, succeed. Parents are committed to working on committees, sharing ideas and doing whatever it takes to help PIN succeed.

We are confident this collaboration between JEVS, PIN members and their parents will continue to enhance the lives of all those it touches and we look forward to sharing many more anniversaries with our PIN community.

– **Lois & Jerry**, founding PIN parents

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PIN members attending CPR class



Some PIN members on a Pocono’s ski trip



PIN members presenting at meeting

PIN is a program of JEVS Human Services



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