

**School of Allied Health Professions** Human Development Center

### Introduction

Hi! My name is Will Johnson. I am actively pursuing my dreams. I also have an Intellectual Disability.

I was in a self-contained classroom for most of my life. I spent my school days in one classroom with other students with disabilities. This bothered me because I felt that I didn't have a chance to be a regular student who got to experience the social life, extracurriculars, and even the challenges of school.

After high school, I wanted to work but many people doubted that I would be able to learn the skills to hold a job. My dad told me not to let those doubts get to me because having a disability shouldn't stop me from working. Ever since he told me that I felt like I could do anything. Hearing other people's doubts motivated me to try harder to show them I can do it.

With the support of my family and Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS), I completed a transition program called PAYCheck. I was able to attend a local community college and participate in college courses. I also learned self-determination and selfadvocacy skills which I use in my daily life.

PAYCheck taught me skills that helped me become independent and have a full-time job. As I share my story, I will guide you along the stops I have made in my journey since high school.

My goal for this poster is for people to walk away knowing what is possible when you challenge yourself and connect with a supportive community.

### **About PAYCheck**

#### HDC's Postsecondary Transition Program

PAYCheck is a program where young adults with disabilities participate in traditional courses at a community college, learn community and workrelated skills, and gain employment experience through two 10-week paid internships. By the end of the program, participants are placed in a long-term job.

PAYCheck is a program by the Human Development Center (HDC) at LSU Health New Orleans, Louisiana's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD).



#### Resources and more!

Visit the webpage for a text-only version, narrated videos, and information on PAYCheck. www.hdc.lsuhsc.edu/News1/2024-10-4\_aucd\_the-will-to-overcome.aspx

# The WILL to Overcome: The Will Johnson Story

By: Will Johnson



My postsecondary journey started as a high school senior when my teacher selected me to participate in the PAYCheck program.

SART

At this time, I was in a selfcontained classroom at my high school.



#### Job Placement

I met the hiring manager of Audubon Zoo at a Job Fair. He saw my potential and all of the

skills I learned at PAYCheck. He offered me a job on the spot during my interview.



I am now the Admin Coordinator at Louisiana's UCEDD! I love this job because I get to connect with others and advocate for inclusion.

My future aspirations include being a mentor for people with disabilities and creating my own support group to empower individuals with disabilities.



Outcomes

coworkers don't make me feel any different."

"Working is important

to me because I wake

up every day knowing I

will be included at work. My

"I believe every person with a

disability should have the

opportunity to work."

Each of the stops on my journey gave me skills I needed to pursue my dreams. This may not have been possible if I didn't enroll in PAYCheck and have the support of my family and community.

Feeling included on the college campus and worksites gave me confidence to pursue my GED, finish college, and live life independently.

I encourage schools to include all students with disabilities in all things, and teach individuals self-advocacy and selfdetermination skills.

Postsecondary transition is a team effort that should be led by the person with a disability. The team should discuss available resources, develop a strong support system, and have faith that the individual can achieve anything.

#### College Courses

PAYCheck helped me enroll in courses at a local community college.

I took college readiness, customer service, and personal finance courses with other students my age. I got to attend campus events with new friends.

### **Work & Life Skills Training**

I was prepared for independent living as I gained work and life skills. I learned how to budget and manage money, how to transfer buses, how to effectively use my cellphone to support communication and community navigation, and how to communicate with others in a respectful way while still advocating for my needs.

### Career Exploration

PAYCheck took me to visit several worksites and career fairs where I got to explore careers of interest to me. I learned how to talk about the jobs I wanted, prepare a resume, and come with a smile.

## **Paid Internships**

I learned my first job skills in an internship at the University Medical Center and got paid for it! I learned how to report to work on time. I even learned how to communicate with my supervisor if I had any issues. I also learned how to prioritize my tasks at work and have them done in a timely manner.

### Remember that you are more than your disability!

A quote I shared in my senior class yearbook is "The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away." My gift is to be an advocate and inspiration. I want to pour into the community and spread the message of greatness. I want to give people the tools and strategies so they know they can keep going through whatever they're going through.

Have faith in yourself and you can overcome any obstacle! Remember to step out of your comfort zone! You have to be willing to go out there and be great in order to succeed. There are resources and community to support you!

### Core Transition Stop

### Practicing Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy Skills

With PAYCheck, I got to decide for myself the life I wanted. I got to experience a full-time job, travel, and dating. I'm grateful because I got the chance to advocate for myself to say, "I deserve this and I deserve the chance to fall and get back up." These tools helped me to get the knowledge and skills to be independent and free.

### Core Transition Stop

#### Integrated College Courses

Taking courses helped me develop the skills I need for work. They helped me develop communication and decisionmaking skills that I use every day in work meetings. They also taught me not to be afraid to contribute and that not everything has a right or wrong answer.

It also gave me the confidence that I can pursue leadership roles.

### Core Transition Stop

### Connecting to Community Supports

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) was crucial throughout my journey because they helped finance college, transportation, and the technology required to be successful beyond high school.

I know I can always call my LRS Counselor for professional guidance and help in securing accommodations. LRS helps me be successful.

### A message to Families

Families should inspire youth to go higher. Allow your kids to go through the ups and downs of life. It will teach them how to live life on life's terms.

As the individual is on their journey, remind them that they have support but you have to let them be on their journey. They will learn how to overcome obstacles and be the best that they can be in this world.

