



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE NORMAL?

What does it mean to be normal? For Jenny it was going to work, driving, paying bills, hanging out with friends. Six years ago Jenny had independence, security, and confidence. But in a blink of an eye that was all taken away from her when she woke up in the hospital after a car accident and was told she had a serious brain injury. At the time, the doctors did not know how it would affect her, but knew it would take time for her to heal.

After a battery of tests and assessments, Jenny came to the conclusion that “she wasn’t normal any more.” She couldn’t work and was afraid to drive. She lost her independence and became reliant on family for transportation and paying bills. Jenny was depressed and angry, but worst of all, she lost all of her confidence.

Jenny became a client of Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Minneapolis (JFCS) through Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Her services included a paid training opportunity at JFCS working to provide office support. It was slow at first – working with staff from all departments, Jenny was reintroduced to sorting, filing and shredding, with the primary objective to test her stamina. She performed well on these tasks and proved she had the strength and endurance to return to work. Jenny was convinced that this was the best her life would be moving forward. She was just happy to be able to pay her bills.

Pretty soon Jenny took on more responsibilities. She delivered mail, organized program orientation folders, helped with mass mailings and more. JFCS’ Administrative Professional Team took her under its wing and helped her learn more office duties. She even started to cover reception during breaks and answer phones. When Jenny encountered a few financial hardships during this time, JFCS was able to refer her to its financial assistance program.

Jenny took on more responsibilities, yet her greatest challenge was doubting herself and her abilities. JFCS’ Vocational Rehabilitation staff members, as well as others within the agency, worked with her on her confidence. When she was ready, they encouraged her to start looking for competitive employment. This was a big step for Jenny, who still lacked confidence in her abilities.

Jenny continued to work as a supported employee, honing her skills while she looked for work. She applied to countless jobs and went on many interviews. Each time she was turned down her confidence suffered. With encouragement from the Vocational Rehabilitation team, Jenny continued to apply for jobs and go to interviews. As time went on she started to believe what the other JFCS staff all knew – that she just needed to find the right employer who would see that she was an amazing employee that always gave it her all.

That employer ended up being a law firm, which had an opening for an Office Assistant position. An attorney at the firm contacted JFCS because he was aware of its excellent career services and high

quality clients seeking work. After only a single interview, Jenny proudly announced that she would be to starting a new, full-time position at the law firm.

Over the next year she continued to meet with a JFCS employment counselor for ongoing support. She gradually developed her skills and took on more and more responsibilities. With these new responsibilities came raises and more confidence. Her new confidence affected all aspects of her life. After six years of not driving, Jenny built up the courage to get behind the wheel again. For the first time since her car accident she had the independence she had lost in so many ways.

Jenny has been so successful at the law firm that she requested that JFCS close her file as she is ready to be fully independent. She never thought the day would come, but she felt as though she had re-gained most of what she lost six years ago. She was a valued employee who had the independence, security and confidence she so desired.

Her employer recently sent an email to JFCS to report Jenny's amazing progress:

"I just wanted to tell each of you how wonderfully Jenny is working out at our firm. We just did her annual review, and based on her great work, she received a very nice raise in salary.

After the review she and I were talking and she told me that "it is great to be normal again!"

Thanks again for the referral of Jenny, she is a gem."

To learn more about JFCS Career Services visit www.jfcsmpls.org.