

SUCCESS STORY

FEATURING RYDELL S.

JUNE 2023



MEET RYDELL!

We all have diverse and unique life stories. Yet they all contain a compelling narrative of achievements and challenges which we cope with and endure. Is it a privilege and blessing for which we should be grateful? Yes, yes, it is!

Here's a snippet of the Steele's family resilient blessing prior to the birth of Rydell.

Rydell's grandfather was hit by car at the age of 7. He was in a coma for months and had to relearn how to walk despite his partial paralysis. He went on to provide for his family as a Chauffeur and retired from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania after 27 years for service.

Rydell's grandmother, born with low vision retired from Tri-County Blind Association. Relying on her faith, she walked thru Harrisburg City neighborhoods to catch the city bus to get to and from work. And she cooked and cleaned daily despite limited vision.

Rydell's brother, suffered a viral infection at 5yrs old, was given low life expectancy. He had to complete months of occupational, speech and physical therapy. He is thriving, and is a productive citizen employed by UPMC.

Born into a resilient family that had to overcome obstacles and thrive despite adversity. Rydell, affectionately known as Bear, was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual Disability at an early age. He received early intervention service through Capital Area Intermediate Unit, which we believe has had such a tremendous positive outcome on his abilities. Even though, he had his delays in development, you immediately knew, there's something very unique about Rydell.

In childhood, he was fascinated with locomotives, trains and automobiles. He had a collection of Hot Wheels toy cars, that he took everywhere. He also had a ferocious appetite, which he still has to this day.

Throughout his years of education and development, Rydell inherited his family's ability to withstand, rebound, and grow. Nurtured with the family's framework and dedication of Central Dauphin School district faculty and affiliates, Rydell is graduating from Central Dauphin East High School this June. He will also be graduating from the Penn State Health Project SEARCH program in May.

Rydell began his employment journey in September of 2016, working as a non-paid trainee at Big Lot's where he worked on soft skills related to employment. He continued to develop his work skills the following school year at the Hampton Inn. Following the 2018-2019 school year, Rydell was ready to move on to in-district paid work training.

Rydell worked at East Middle School in their cafeteria. He initially focused on working in the dish room, but quickly picked up other work skills such as basic food prep, serving, and other light cleaning. Rydell always kept himself busy and was popular amongst his co-workers. It was clear that Rydell was a part of their team when they would have themed shirt days, for example, and would make sure that Rydell had a shirt of his own to wear. In fact, Rydell was so good at his job that his boss at that time, Eric, offered him the opportunity to work there as a permanent Nutrition Inc. employee. Eric stated that, "Rydell excels in every field of his job performance. He is truly a pleasure to work with."

However, Rydell and his school team had other plans for him. In 2022, Rydell became an intern at the Penn State Health Project SEARCH program where he completed 2 internships. His first internship was with environmental health, helping to ensure many areas of the hospital were clean. His second was with linens, collecting soiled linens and providing clean ones to many different departments. Rydell's teacher at Project SEARCH noted that, "Rydell always kept himself busy and was an amazing task initiator. He is an extremely hard worker, and we were thrilled to have him in our program. He continually brought joy to every person he came in contact with, and we are proud of his accomplishments."

Rydell's mom, Caroline, initially had some concerns about Rydell's participation in this program due to his communication difficulties. However, his transition coordinator, Mrs. Berra, assured her that he was a great candidate for the program and knew that it would allow Rydell to flourish. Not only did Rydell excel in his internships, but he did such an outstanding job in his internships, that he was recognized by the Project SEARCH staff as their Tom Buskey Student Achievement winner.

As Rydell finished up his time at Project SEARCH, it was time to look for permanent employment and he decided to return to his roots. Rydell is currently working at East Middle School once again, but this time as a permanent Nutrition Inc. employee. For those who have worked with Rydell, we can say that he is one of the sweetest, most respectful, responsible young people you'll ever have the privilege to know!