



TAYLOR'S STORY

BY TAYLOR CARLEY

My name is Taylor Carley. I'm 22, and I want to make a difference in this world. After high school graduation, I mainly stayed at home and kept to myself. I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I was afraid to say what was on my mind. I just never felt I belonged anywhere because of my disability. I felt like I had nowhere to go and no way to find what I wanted for my future. That's when my mom introduced me to the Institute for Disability Studies (IDS) at The University of Southern Mississippi, and I found my second family.

First, I began to volunteer and then to do national service, which let me experience new things that I have never done before. I've done a lot in the community now and have promoted that disabilities are really abilities. I know about this firsthand as I have an ability called autism.

Right now, I'm a full-time AmeriCorps member for the TRIAD Service AmeriCorps Program. I serve as co-treasurer on the STEP UP to Leadership Council and also serve on the state self-advocacy team. I had my first job at Sam's Club in Hattiesburg last year, and I've also won an award for my advocacy work. I was honored with the first Breaking Barriers Award presented by the Mississippi Special Education Advisory Panel in 2014.

Being part of the TRIAD Service AmeriCorps program has allowed me to gain knowledge of what I'm capable of doing with my talents and expressing myself. It has given me the desire to do more and learn. I have made many friends that support me, have made new life goals, and have been able to go on trips around Mississippi and to Atlanta to tell my story about what I have done. And I have continued to learn new skills. As part of the TRIAD Service AmeriCorps Program, I have learned how to create résumés, cover letters, and my person-centered plan for the future.

Even with all these accomplishments, I have struggled through difficult times as I have become more independent. Like most adults, I've had to deal with family issues and the loss of a loved one. I felt afraid to press forward toward the future and was terrified about all the changes around me. But I did adjust and found my path and knew I had to keep fighting the fight. My friends, peers, and family helped me overcome those dark days and push forward in my life. They gave me advice and showed me how to push those barriers aside. All of these experiences have made me more confident and given me a desire to be a stronger leader.

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Without the programs at IDS, I would not have been able to do what I am doing now. My experiences at IDS have taught me the meaning of truly being an example for others, spreading awareness about the disability world and working on personal skills. As of today, I am now able to speak for myself and be a leader among leaders, and I am working toward being a writer. I want to publish my work and share

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my story with others. I do plan to continue my volunteer work and helping the community. I also plan to study hard, take the permit test and obtain my driver's license so I can drive independently. I hope to one day move out of my family home and have my own house. Above all else, I want everybody to know that a disability is an ability, and I am just like everyone else.



My mom is so proud of what I am accomplishing. "Within a year of him being a part of IDS and AmeriCorps, he came out of his shell and was speaking in front of large groups of people," Ms. Carley said. "He just wants to help others and make a difference. It takes a sweet soul to be that selfless."



TRIAD Service AmeriCorps, funded through the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service, focused on providing financial literacy education for people with disabilities for the 2014-2015 service year.