

Uriah Jason Sampson

New Hope Assistance Dogs



We were blessed to have Jason come into our lives when he was three months old. At first sight we knew that Jason is very special and that he would become a part of our family. Jason came to us through the foster care system. Anyone that knows the foster care system understands that there are many ups and downs. Our journey led us to adopt Jason when he was 1 1/2 years old. Since the first time we saw Jason, we could see the special sparkle for life in his eyes. He has been dealt many difficulties and he continues to overcome every obstacle in his way. Since an early age Jason was delayed on all of his milestones and was enrolled in speech, physical and occupational therapy. He takes these therapies in stride and continues to grow physical, mentally and socially. Through all the therapy we could see that physically there was something wrong with Jason. We noticed that he was very fussy, could not run, go up and down steps and that his left side began to have a gait. After many visits to Shriners' and Pittsburgh Children's Hospital, Jason was diagnosed with Arnold Chiari Malformation at the age of 4. Chiari Malformation is a structural defect in the brain's cerebellum and spinal column. This is the part of the brain that controls balance. With Chiari malformations individuals have difficulty with dizziness, muscle weakness, numbness, vision problems, headaches, problems with balance and coordination. Jason was immediately scheduled for surgery following his diagnosis. This is one of the most terrifying things that you can hear - your son has to have brain surgery and that they hope it will improve his condition and if we don't do the surgery there is a very good chance he will be paralyzed or he could die. Following the 6 hour surgery we entered the ICU recovery room to find a screaming little boy standing on his bed with nurses trying to calm him as he yelled for us. Due to the surgery his eyes were swollen shut and he was calmed once he heard our voice. Jason is a fighter and he continues to battle side effects of the surgery and Chiari Malformation. He is constantly battling numbness in his legs, arms and tongue along with head aches and neck pain. Although Jason can now run at his own pace, he physically continues to have difficulty with stairs and balance.

During the time he was diagnosed with Chiari Malformation, we noticed that Jason was showing signs of





Autism. As we were seeing doctors for his Chiari Malformation we began seeing doctors to rule out any Autism traits. Hoping his delays and Autism traits were side affects of his Chiari, our fears were confirmed when Jason was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder by Pittsburgh Children's Hospital. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurologically based developmental disorder characterized by impairment in social interactions and communication as well as restricted or stereotyped patterns of behavior and interest. Many of Jason's ASD characteristics that you will see are his extreme sensitivity to sound and touch, speech and communication difficulties, impulsively, repetitive behaviors and obsessions. As with his Chiari, Jason struggles with his ASD daily. He is constantly on heightened awareness of sounds and deals with the anxiety of when there is going to be a fire alarm, who is chewing, is there a storm and if there is going to be fireworks. These sounds can send him into a panic and have even sent him into a hysterical state. We constantly reassure him that he will be ok and when ever we attend an event or go outside the house we check the weather (Are there any storms in the area? Could he have a fire drill today?), have his headphones in hand and make sure that there are not going to be any sort of fireworks. Also when at home, Jason has a special area he sits to eat so that he can not hear any chewing. Jason also has difficulty with obsessions. He is obsessed with things like John Deere tractors, monster trucks and currently wrestling consume his life. Everything he does feeds his obsession and consumes a majority of his time. When we are in public and he hears different sounds, crowds of people or sees one of his obsessions Jason will either wander or bolt away. His safety is often compromised and we are constantly on alert with his wandering tendencies.



How will an assistance dog help?

We hope that an assistance dog will help Jason with his anxieties, obsessions, safety, social interactions, behaviors and give Jason some freedom. We are constantly on heightened alert wondering what Jason is doing, where he is and is he safe? Jason is full of life and all we want for him is to live his life to it's fullest without barriers. With an assistance dog we believe that barriers can be removed and that Jason's spark for life will be even brighter!