A New Normal... Because of You

Darren was living his life. He grew up on a lake and played hockey whenever possible. In fact, he and his family loved sports. Darren says “if it was competitive, we played it.” Baseball, basketball, soccer, tennis – even golf though Darren found that a little boring. He was done with school and was working full time in his family’s hardware store.

Disaster Strikes

One dark night in October, 25 year old Darren D. turned a corner and hit a moose full on, landing the animal on the roof of his car. The accident resulted in a spinal cord injury that changed his life forever.

After three months at Health South, Darren returned home to live with his parents. For the next three years, Darren stayed at home. Enter, thanks to your support, GSIL.

Your Support Makes A Difference

Darren says he had a lot of trouble at first with many things like dressing, shaving, exercising. But because he worked hard, and because our attendant care workers were able to help, Darren has now been living on his own for more than eight years. He has figured out ways to be independent! And GSIL continues to support Darren’s goals.

He is back to work in the hardware store. Just like for you and me, housework is a chore.

But when asked what he does in his spare time, his voice changes with excitement:

“I was coming down to Concord for physical therapy and just happened to pick up one of those free newspapers. In it I learned that the Shaskeen Pub in Manchester had an open mic night for comics. That was my first gig and I found I really enjoyed it!”

Darren has performed at many comedy clubs; the Broadway Comedy Club in New York, Mohegan Sun in Connecticut, and even as far as Cleveland, Ohio!

Because you support the important goal of independence, Darren has a new life, a new normal. Thousands of others have had similar experiences and you have helped them all to live the life they want to live, where they want, and how they want. Just like Darren.
The 1980’s

I had the privilege to join the GSIL board of directors two years ago but as I write this I realize my first contact with the organization really goes back to its beginning in the late 1980’s. My wife Nancy and I moved to New Hampshire in 1987 when I was just starting my medical practice. Early on I met Larry Robinson, one of the founders of GSIL.

The 1990’s

This was in the time just before passage of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act and Larry, in his power wheelchair, was constantly traveling to and from Washington, D.C. advocating for this monumental bill. I was young and able bodied then and really had no idea of the importance of the ADA. Mainly I was irritated with Larry who was making it nearly impossible for me to take care of him medically! I now realize that Larry, who has since passed away, was really taking care of me.

Fast Forward

In the years following my time trying to tend to Larry’s medical needs I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and eventually needed to use a wheelchair for mobility. I now understand fully the importance of the tireless work that Larry Robinson and Granite State Independent Living did and still does to advocate and care for those of us living with disabilities.

Today

My wife Nancy and I live in Hopkinton. In 2013 I retired from my Concord medical practice but have been busier now than ever before. I’m an avid woodworker though finding time for the shop seems just as challenging as I was still working full time. We are enjoying the time we have with our first grandchild Clara who just turned one. Also I’m active in Rotary having served as president of Hopkinton Rotary (2014-15) as well as currently serving on the Board of Trustees for the First Congregational Church of Hopkinton and the Hopkinton Library Foundation, and as a member of the Hopkinton School District Facility Planning committee. I joined the GSIL board in 2014 and am proud to serve such a fine and important organization. Maybe I’ll get into the workshop more next year....

Goals

Because of your generosity, we exceeded our revenue goals last year by more than 11%. We’re confident that with your continued support, we can do it again!

Our goal for Fiscal 2016 (10/1/15 – 9/30/16) is $121,000. Please keep on keepin’ on – play wheelchair basketball or sponsor a player, join our golf tournament, think of us this December the 31st as you consider your tax position. Whatever you did last year, please do it again! As always, we can’t do it without YOU!
The Challenge

In April 2016, I will be riding across America to help support programs for at-risk youth as they transition into adulthood. I am not a professional cyclist. I actually work as an Employment Coordinator at GSIL helping students with disabilities achieve success.

This cross country bike ride will be unsupported, meaning that I will be doing this solo! Riding through the cold rains, sweating in the desert sun, camping at night and carrying everything that I will need for 2 months on my person.

When I tell people about my trip, they always ask, “Why?”

Why?

My short answer is, “Because kids like Shawn need your help.”

Shawn is an 18 year-old African American with a visual impairment resulting from albinism. Growing up, he had a hard time fitting in and so he grew up angry. He got in fights. He dropped out of school. He landed himself in placement. Then he learned about GSIL.

That’s when Shawn changed gears. He is now a graduate of GSIL’s Earn & Learn Opportunities program, an alternative learning program where students learn real-world skills (i.e. interviewing, interning, personal finances) while earning academic credits outside of the classroom. The non-traditional environment better suited his learning style, personal and professional needs. It allowed Shawn the opportunity for success. Today, he’s working towards earning his GED with a dream of entering the medical field.

In A Job Or A Cell?

This is the time in a student’s life that can determine whether they land a job after high school or whether they land themselves in prison. It’s the journey you take that defines the destination.

How You Can Help

Please visit www.ChangingGearsAtGSIL.org to donate to my cause. Stay tuned on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GraniteStateIndependentLiving for tour updates, donor highlights and to track my progress!

Doug Craw, GSIL
Employment Coordinator

“I’m Doug and I am getting ready to embark on a 3,400 mile mission!”
Whooping It Up!

GSIL's 5th Annual Wheelchair Basketball Tournament

Grab your friends – grab your family – form a team of eight and then call Leslie Ari at 603-410-6532 or email her at lari@gsil.org to enroll your team.

You don’t need to be an athlete or a wheelchair user. In fact, most of our players are able bodied non-athletes. But the one thing that all players have in common? They are folks who like to have fun!

Come Whoop it Up with Us

Saturday,
May 7th, 2016
Pembroke, NH

A Special Thanks...

Kerner’s Car Wash and Quick Lube

Kerner’s is a family owned business that has been operating in New Hampshire for 30 years. Over the past 5 years, the owners have continually partnered with GSIL’s Earn & Learn Program to provide internships and job placements to Manchester students with disabilities. E&L is a program designed to help students who are struggling in high school learn employment skills and earn high school credits through this experience.

Kerner’s has fully embraced this mission, and has mentored 15 youth over the course of the program. Not only do the students learn automotive skills such as oil changes, auto detailing and state inspections, they develop soft skills; a strong work ethic, excellent attendance, punctuality and interpersonal skills.

The experience has been so valuable to these students that Kerner’s has offered a job to 6 out of the 15 students who have completed their internship! Dave, Shawn and Cathie can be counted on to teach, mentor and show compassion. It has been a pleasure partnering with them over the last five years.