

*Joel Spencer Reese's Personal Story:*

*For the past several years, I resided in an ISL setting and shared a home with three roommates that I had very little in common with. I never really felt like that was my home, as there were frequent staff and roommate changes and when my mom and friends came to visit me, my roommates and staff were always around so no one really felt comfortable to visit. There were also many rules that made me angry. For instance, it was a big deal for me to eat in the living room while I was watching TV at night. I also had to have someone with me all the time, which made me feel like no one trusted me or thought I was capable of doing some things by myself. Lots of meetings were held over the years with the provider agency and my mom to discuss my behaviors. At one of the meetings, my mom was informed about a program called Self Directed Services. After hearing about this program, I thought I could finally have more control and be more independent. I just wanted and needed more freedom. That decision changed my life. I had a whole team behind me. Amanda, Andrea and Terri have always supported me and encouraged me to move forward.*



**Spencer at his new apartment**

*In September of 2009, I moved into my own apartment. I have chosen not to have a roommate at this time. By self directing, with the assistance of my mom, who is called the employer of record, I am able to assist in managing the care I receive. One aspect of this is the hiring and firing of staff. Self direction allows me to choose who is going to work for me, so I'm not stuck with a personal assistant that just doesn't quite get along with me. The people that*

*work for me, I truly trust and like. I've been able to hire relatives that know me well and a previous staff member that worked for me in the past that I think of as a second mom.*

*Through self direction, I have the opportunity to assist my mom in training my own staff. Staff members work for me, so I don't have to worry anymore about being told I can't eat in my own room or I can't go to the races tonight because my roommate doesn't want to go. My personal assistants are trained on what my needs and supports are so they can assist me in reaching my goals and assisting me when I need help with something. Currently, I'm learning how to cook and manage my money.*

*Another feature of self directing that I really like is being able to adjust the times of day my staff works for me. If I need to be dropped off at the RC races on Friday evenings, or go to my volunteer job at the Fire House on Tuesday's and then shopping at 2 pm on Saturday, I can adjust my staff's schedule to match my own. I'm not stuck at home staring at the walls. I can go out and have fun with friends and family when I choose. It is also much easier to figure out how I can spend time with my Mom based on mine and her schedules.*

Spencer with his rabbit  
Bugsy



*For the first time in a very long time, I feel like this is my home and I feel very comfortable having friends and family come over to visit. I was also able to get a pet Rabbit, Bugsy, to share my home with. I have many more friends and natural supports than I ever dreamed of having before. I have friends that often pick me up and we go to the races together, instead of having a paid personal assistant take me. A few weeks ago, I went to St. Charles for the weekend and participated in a big RC race with a friend who also enjoys race car races. Of course, my mom knows my friend and feels comfortable with him taking me places. My mom tried calling me several times on Saturday to make sure I was doing ok. When I finally answered my phone Saturday evening I told her I was too busy to talk. I now know more about how my mom feels when she is trying to work and I call her several times.*

*Thanks to self directed supports and self determination, I am able to spend a few hours every night by myself in my own apartment without staff's assistance. If I need something, I have my mom's number and back-up numbers to call if an emergency should happen. I feel like I'm finally in control over my own life and people trust me now to make responsible decisions. I'm also able to ride my bike to Wal-Mart and my Dr's office without staff following me. Currently, I'm volunteering at the Fire House where I received the Serviceman of the Year award. A few*



Spencer at the Firehouse

*days ago, I had an interview for a night position at Wal-Mart. I have my fingers crossed that I will get the job. Night-time is my best time. But if I don't get the job I will keep looking until I find one. Taking charge of my own life has enabled me to have the life that I have always wanted and be a part of the community where I live. It is a decision I am glad to have made.*