

#ThinkABILITY

CRAIG BLACKBURN

My name is Craig Blackburn and I am thirty-seven years old. I am a peer/self-advocate, motivational speaker, and I have Down syndrome. My message as a motivational speaker and advocate emphasizes inclusion, ability, and full participation in life for ALL.

As you read my story, you will see that I have led as typical a life as possible and that my life is not that different from yours.

I have always been included in every phase of life from a very early age. I was in a fully inclusive educational setting throughout my school years and graduated with a regular high school diploma meeting all the same requirements as my peers. I never failed a class or a grade. I played sports throughout my life, have been an active member of my church as an altar server, a 4th Degree in the Knights of Columbus, and participated in school activities. I even earned my black belt in karate.

One of my greatest honors was at the age of 14. I was selected as a foreign exchange student and traveled to Italy where I had an audience with Pope John Paul II. In 1996, I carried the Olympic Torch as it passed through Louisiana.

Every year I travel to Washington, D.C. for the Buddy Walk on Washington to advocate for



MY MOTTO

Success Comes
in Trying!

issues that will impact the lives of individuals with special needs. In 2009, I traveled to Qatar, in the Middle East, for my first international speaking engagement. The message of ability is the same throughout the world. WE CAN!

For the past sixteen years, I've been employed by Winn Dixie, and I also became certified in food preparation.

I am on the Board of Directors for the Down Syndrome Association of Greater New Orleans (DSAGNO) and the Louisiana Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities Council (OCDD). I graduated from Partners in Policy Making, a program that teaches individuals how to advocate for themselves and others with special needs. Every person CAN make a difference!

I purchased a condo six years ago through the Home of My Own program. Since then, I live independently and have a place to call my own.

2016 has been an amazing year! My fiance, Heather Hancock and I fulfilled our dream of becoming husband and wife. After meeting fourteen years ago and being engaged for nine years, on June 7, 2016, we had a commitment ceremony in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. It was magical and everything we had dreamed of. Also, we each had a reception in our home state, Oklahoma for Heather and Louisiana for me. Once my parents sell their home and I sell my condo, we will move to Oklahoma where Heather and I will begin our life together.



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#Think**ABILITY** is a month long social media campaign to celebrate the accomplishments of individuals with disabilities. The campaign is coordinated by Families Helping Families of Jefferson and held annually during the month of **March**. Learn more about it at <http://fhfjefferson.org/whats-going-on/special-events/thinkability>

Changing Lives. Every Day.