

#ThinkABILITY

ALEX TINDLE

Allowing Your Expectations to Grow

By: Jamie S. Tindle

Most that know me, know Alex. In the event you've not had the pleasure, Alex is 21 years old and the youngest of my three accomplished beautiful children. I've been a single mom for the past 14 years. Alex has a rare syndrome called Cardio-Facio-Cutaneous Syndrome (CFC Syndrome) resulting in varying developmental disabilities since birth. We searched for a diagnosis for 19 years until finally, March 6, 2015; we received a definitive diagnosis (never give up).

When Alex was only 10 weeks old, an ER physician told me he had severe neurological issues and basically left me with not a lot of hope. I argued that he was very bright; he knew my voice, smiled at me, etc... As time continued, I always saw that flicker of hope in his eyes that he could do more than others thought he could do, although most of the time he was extremely ill. I pushed him to do more every chance I had, always reminding him he could do great things.

All of Alex's academic career I made sure he was in classes with his typical peers as much as possible and trust me that was no easy task. As time (and life) evolved, his time at school was like sand through an hour glass and the older he got the faster the sand would fall. I knew we had



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to work on a plan of what he would do once he graduated. Even as early as his years in junior high, I knew we needed to begin working toward a solid transition plan. For kids like Alex and so many others, it takes a lot more work and practice to accomplish and learn things. I knew we must begin early. The ideas began at home with a dialogue between Alex and me about what he might like to do when he grows up. We explored some of his interests by going to Wal-Mart and having him scan the items at the self-checkout, volunteering at our church, and working the registration table for events through my work.

When Alex was in 10th grade, I personally reached out to Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) and requested services for him. I, like so many, had always been told LRS services begin in the last year of high school; that didn't sit well with me. If we waited until his senior year, he would never have enough time to figure out what would be the best job for him. Quite possibly after he graduated, he would be sitting at home with nothing to do. My expectations for my son were for him to graduate high school "with" a job!!! I enlisted the assistance of the Advocacy Center and other advocates on his behalf. With their help, LRS services would begin in 10th grade in order for him to meet his individualized transition needs.

After about a year of evaluations, meetings, writing plans, and you name it, Alex was finally approved for supported employment during his 11th grade year. Supported Employment services actually assisted Alex in finding a job that was right for him. In the summer approaching 12th grade, he got a job at Rouse's Market #55, July 13, 2015, just a few miles from our home!! Yes, that's right! A competitive paying job BEFORE he started his senior year in high school! All of this had to be implemented in Alex's IEP and took a lot of effort from his IEP team to adjust his instructional time and work schedule. In the end, he had a beautifully written individualized transition plan.

Just when I thought things couldn't get any better... Alex and I are members of Christ's Community Church in Denham Springs. We love our church! We feel at home there included and loved. On this particular Monday, January 25th, 2016, night during revival the invitation was given. I looked next to me where Alex was usually parked in his wheelchair and he was gone, headed to the front of the church with great determination. At first, I thought I should stop him but suddenly remembered, he is 20-years-old now and knows and understands exactly what he is doing. Alex Tindle made the greatest decision he could have ever made and gave his life to Christ. Attending church and having faith in our Lord is nothing new for him, but for him to take this step of faith in our church which was packed that evening was simply beautiful. I never really thought of Alex actually being water baptized either, especially having mobility and sensory issues, but Pastors Willis, Shannon Easley, and the rest of our CCC

Family were there to make this moment very special for Alex and for me! So on Sunday, Super Bowl 50, February 7, 2016, Alex Tindle was baptized.

Alex graduated from Denham Springs High School, May 2016, with a regular high school diploma. I am also very proud to say that he is still employed with Rouse's Market #55 since he graduated. He loves his job there and they love him.

Graduating for Alex, and so many others, was made possible due to the tremendous advocacy efforts across the state by families, professionals, and legislators believing that alternate diploma pathways should be offered to students with disabilities by way of Act 833. This legislation has changed the future for Alex and a growing number of students in Louisiana. My congratulations to these graduates and all graduates that have worked diligently for this honorable accomplishment as well as their families for never giving up!!

Reaching the day to day and month to month goals Alex has accomplished hasn't been easy. Of his greatest, from "my" perspective, have been being water baptized at our church, graduating high school and being employed.

There was a time when I thought there were some things Alex would never do or overcome the fear of doing. Schedules, routines, not accepting a change of plans, spontaneous actions without rehearsals or prompting was just a part of our life and we seemed to adjust to this as a family. But very gradually I began seeing Alex more able to handle things maturely with less and less resistance. When your child is 21 you pretty much feel like he is an adult now and change will begin to slow down or cease completely. You think to yourself perhaps they won't continue to learn new things, like new things, improve their behaviors, etc. Well, I'm here to encourage you to never give up and never stop trying and most importantly allow your expectations to grow.



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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.