

Her Independence, Self-Esteem, and Self-Advocacy Skills have Grown Every Step of the Way!

by: *Raquel Castaneda*

Jessica Nobles is a very bright and lovely 23-year-old woman with autism. We've known each other since we were in high school together. She has constantly shown me her strengths and abilities, is very well-spoken, and is a good self-advocate. Having good self-advocacy skills enabled Jessica to speak up for herself at school if she needed support.



Families Helping Families of Jefferson recently teamed up with LSUHDC to provide a six-week cooking course for youth and young adults with a disability, their families, and support staff. As the Youth Information & Training Specialist for FHF, it was my responsibility to look for and hire a recruit to be my co-teacher. I interviewed some potential candidates but unfortunately, they weren't the right fit. I thought of Jessica and felt she would be a perfect fit, so I reached out to her and her family to see if she would be interested. Sometimes parents/guardians can be hesitant or afraid to let their loved one with a disability try new things or take on what they perceive as too much responsibility. At first, this was the case with Jessica's family, because prior to beginning the course, Jessica had no experience in the kitchen. She was determined not to let this stop her from being a part of this experience. Her self-advocacy skills led the way and she decided to take the job.

This is an actual paying job for Jessica to learn and teach about healthy eating habits and cooking methods. Since the classes began, Jessica talks about how much she enjoys them and how she is in disbelief that she is actually doing this. She even called our old high school to share with her former teachers that she is co-teaching a cooking class. She is very proud of herself and her face lights up every time the class is about to begin.

When she received her first paycheck, she was confused and asked me a couple of times if it was really hers. I think we all get excited when we receive our first paycheck, but I haven't seen anyone who was more excited than she.

Although beginning the course without experience in the kitchen, Jessica quickly learned valuable life skills and job skills. In doing so, she became an excellent co-teacher sharing all she learned with the class. Her independence, self-esteem, and self-advocacy skills have grown every step of the way!

#WaytoGeauxJessica