



A PLACE FOR SAM

BY LISA KEATHLEY

Sam Myers was born 24 years ago, a lively newborn doing what newborns do. Eighteen months later, mom Jennifer Myers noticed that Sam was not progressing verbally the way he should. She wondered what was happening and started to investigate...and from that moment on became a fierce advocate for her son. Sam was diagnosed with Landau-Kleffner Syndrome, a rare disorder characterized by the loss of language abilities and sleeping seizure activity. Sam's neurologist put Sam on the autism spectrum. But that didn't stop Jennifer — or Sam!

Sam attended the Harbour School of Baltimore, a Maryland nonpublic special education school for children in grades 1 through 12 that provides individualized education to students with learning disabilities, autism, speech and language impairments, and other disabilities. Sam graduated at the age of 21 with his high school diploma. And Jennifer — and dad Michael — continued to advocate for their son. As Michael says, "Jennifer is a fierce advocate for Sam. She always worked for Sam to have the most complete, fulfilling,

and independent life he could have, including work, if possible."

But what type of work? And where would he work? Sam could do many tasks, but finding the right fit for him was a challenge. Sam underwent genetic testing and was re-diagnosed with Smith-Magenis Syndrome, an even rarer disorder determined by a missing chromosome. Although Sam had a new underlying diagnosis, he continued to present with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Sadly, most support services end when a young adult with autism exits the school system. Sam's parents turned to Itineris, a nonprofit that serves 70 Baltimore adults with ASD. Sam was accepted and became a client.

One of the main goals of Itineris is to create "customized employment" opportunities for its clients. The organization builds relationships between employers and employees by matching an

individual's unique skills to the needs of the employer. The approach encourages working interviews or trial shifts to highlight an individual's strengths.

Sam tried several options as part of the Itineris program. He started working as a volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, helping to spackle and sand wallboard. He helped to deliver meals with Moveable Feast. And he participated in a job sampling program at the campus

of Towson State University that included a stint in Towson's computer re-formatting lab. But while Sam is very good with computers, "That was boring!" he said. What he did like was working in Dining Services, meeting and interfacing with people in the cafeteria as he helped bake cookies, sort cutlery, and bus trays. Jennifer started thinking about a

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in employing an adult with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and learning how these special adults can benefit your Baltimore business? Please contact Katie Verster at Itineris at 443-275-1100. Or visit the organization's website at www.itinerisbaltimore.org and look under "Partnerships."



restaurant business where Sam could work. She wondered, "How can we be sure it will be a great environment for Sam?" The answer: Own the business!

Michael had been waiting to find the right formula for his son. An investment professional, he was no stranger to the idea of owning a business. His parents — Sam's grandparents — owned and ran a summer camp in Maine. Sam's great grandfather, Israel Myers, founded the Londontown Manufacturing Company, now known as London Fog, purveyor of men's and women's trench coats, raincoats, and jackets. When Sam showed interest in and talent for restaurant work, Michael went into launch mode, looking to start or buy a small coffee shop where Sam could use his restaurant skills and his love of people.

However, more important than the shop or place was the right person to launch and run it. That

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