

### Disabilities and the Holiday Season

By Ava Howard, Student, Indiana Wesleyan University

The holidays can be a crazy and stressful time of year for individuals with disabilities. The months of November and December bring changes in routine with unfamiliar people, smells, bright lights and loud music. According to a 2013 article published by the University of Southern California, five to sixteen percent of school-aged children are affected by sensory processing disorders. This high percentage suggests that most people will either face sensory issues this holiday season, or be involved with someone who experiences these challenges. For these children and adults, holidays can often move them into a state of stress and overstimulation. However, this does not mean that individuals with disabilities do not want to be included in the festivities and excitement of the holidays.

Taking extra steps can make the holidays more accessible and, therefore, just as great of an experience for these individuals. Here are some steps to do that!

The first way to do this is to become aware of how the holidays impact individuals with disabilities. Increased awareness of this will help you understand different behaviors and have more grace for these individuals this holiday season.

For example, you can learn from Kelsey Fagan. She is a TikToker who has Autism spectrum Disorder and discusses her experiences with holidays and autism. She communicates that people often expect her to express excitement while opening gifts. Individuals with autism do not always display excitement immediately, as they need time to process, and their appearances do not always match how they feel. These expectations of a reaction can hurt both the gift giver and the individual as they can both feel misunderstood. Educating yourself on disabilities will help you gain understanding. For more, you can find Kelsey on TikTok @kelseyfagan96.

Next, you must include individuals with disabilities in your plan to make your holiday activities more accessible. The reality is that there is no one-size-fits-all to how someone with a sensory processing disorder will react to holidays. By asking them to tell you their needs and what they enjoy and do not enjoy, you can better understand how to work with them to make the activities something they would love to participate in. It is essential to ask for information BEFORE the person becomes overwhelmed or frustrated. Becoming familiar with behaviors and challenges that may arise before the event is also important. After asking for suggestions on how you can best support them, it is crucial to take these requests seriously and follow through on the ones you said you would be able to do.



Although the holiday season can be challenging for those with disabilities, festivities can ultimately still be enjoyed through accessibility efforts. May you have a wonderful holiday season and a happy and healthy new year!



**What do you want to be when you grow up?** This question is one we've all probably heard, answered and maybe even asked, many times. Yet, it is one that individuals with disabilities are not often asked. Unfortunately, **approximately 80 percent of individuals with disabilities are unemployed.** You can help change that with a gift to support the new training and career development center at Carey Services.

**Your gift will provide career and life skills training for individuals with disabilities.**

During a recent conversation, Shawn, a young man we serve, shared his dream with our CEO. Shawn wants to help others by working in a kitchen and doing laundry. To achieve his dream, Shawn needs opportunities to gain skills that will help him be successful. That's where you come in, and that's where our new training and career development center will help.

You see, we are renovating a workspace that will help Shawn's dream come true. This new space will offer career and life skills training through practical programming and hands-on training. Individuals will choose their path. They will develop skills that will increase their knowledge, independence and confidence, all while turning their abilities into opportunities. This training center will help Shawn and others learn skills they need for their community-based employment dream to come true. However, we need your assistance to make this happen.

The Carey Services crew is laying the paths, but **we need you as a co-pilot!** Your gift by December 31 will directly support the costs to create paths for career and life skill training – leading individuals with disabilities on their journey to their best life.

**Ready. Set. Go-to-Give...and be a Carey co-pilot!**




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### We Would Like You to Meet...

#### Sally

Moving from a nursing home into one of our group homes, Sally was challenged with weight, needed assistance with her self-care and used an electric wheelchair for mobility. Since then, Sally has worked with our Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to exercise and learn proper nutrition. She helps to prepare meals and set the table along with her housemates and the DSPs. She attends programming at Carey Services where she enjoys her time creating art in the Creative Hearts Art Studio. In just two years, Sally has lost nearly 70 pounds and is now walking with the assistance of a walker. Her self-confidence has increased and she is more independent. Sally is now able to attend church with a friend and is finding more natural supports in the community. Contact Carey Services to learn how you can be a natural support in the community for individuals with disabilities.



#### Callie

When Callie began working with our Pre-Employment Transition Services (PRE-ETS) in high school, she was quiet and timid. Her Employment Specialist talked with her about what she wanted to do after graduation. She was not sure. They discussed things that she found interesting and explored opportunities that would expose her to careers related to her interests. One area of interest was working with children. Callie volunteered with Early Head Start at Carey Services to learn more about becoming a teacher or classroom aide. She found that she enjoyed being in the classroom with the young children. Recently, Callie joined the Early Head Start staff as a Teaching Assistant where she spends her time helping children learn through play and assisting the teacher. Are you an employer who needs employees? Contact the Carey Services Employment Services team to discuss the benefits of inclusive employment.

#### Dakota

Dakota communicates with his hands and eyes, with an assistive device and uses a wheelchair for mobility. The Carey Services staff transport him from the nursing home where he resides to the Wabash Day Programming site three days per week. Dakota has learned how to navigate an electronic tablet, using it to engage with staff. He is enthusiastic and loves to make people smile. His face illuminates with joy when someone talks with him and he works to respond to questions when engaged in conversation. Dakota experiences a meaningful day while growing his social and communication skills. His bright smile shines each day because of donors supporting the work done to help him to live his best life. Programs like this are possible with gifts to support the costs like consumables, technology, staff, transportation and more. To give your gift, scan the QR code to the right, mail or drop off your gift (2724 S. Carey Street, Marion, IN 46953) or contact Kelly Scher, Director of Fund Development, at 765-668-8961 ext. 124 or kelly.scher@careyservices.com.



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