

# My Journey to Independence

My name is Jay Mikush, and I am 23 years old. When I was first diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) at the age of six, I had many challenges interacting with other children. Over the years, I have learned how to be more social with all sorts of people.

**Jay Mikush**





I am proud to have been born and raised in wonderful Winston-Salem, North Carolina. After I graduated from high school, I enrolled in the College Internship Program's (CIP) Brevard Center, a post-high school program for young adults with AS and other learning differences. During this time I also attended Brevard Community College in Melbourne, Florida, where I learned how to live independently.

After I graduated from high school, I found out about CIP and its services from my parents. At first, I was not terribly interested in going because I could not imagine being away from home. However, when I arrived at CIP and got used to being away from home and knowing everyone and how the program worked, I got accustomed to it and realized it was a helpful environment to live in. I had many friends at Brevard, and I participated in a variety of activities, including bowling and going to the beach.

### Social Skills

If I were to choose one of the most critical skills that I improved upon within the last few years, it would be social skills. I had the biggest issue with not being able to say "no" to peer pressure. This occurred mostly in high school where it caused me to get in a lot of trouble with my friends, which I now identify for what they really are—enemies. Now I am able to say "no" in potentially dangerous situations.

I have made a lot of friends through the iCan House ([www.icanhouse.org](http://www.icanhouse.org)), a place for young adults with AS and social challenges in Winston-Salem, where I do many things with friends in my spare time such as visiting amusement parks, going to movies, biking, swimming, attending the local fair, bowling, mini golfing, and much more. I also keep in touch with peers from CIP in the Melbourne area through social media such as Skype and Facebook.

### Independent Living Skills

After attending CIP, I moved back to North Carolina, and I now live in my own apartment with a roommate. I am working with a life coach from the iCan House who is helping me with budgeting, cooking, and other skills. I feel that I have improved in the financial area because I do not spend as much on things that I want, such as a \$100 iTunes gift card. I generally focus on things that I need

such as groceries or gas. Now I am much more cautious with spending my money.

### Job Skills

I have a job coach from a service called Vocational Rehabilitation who is assisting me in seeking a full-time career in the aviation industry once I complete my associate's degree in aviation management.

**DJ.** I own and operate a professional mobile DJ (disc jockey) business and do many types of parties and events throughout the city, county, and state. My long-term goal in life is to be one of the best and well-known DJs in my area.

**Customer Service/Retail.** I recently started working part-time at a local independent movie theater that shows films such as documentaries and independent films. I have been working at this job for about two months now, and I am really enjoying it. My job duties consist of cashiering, ticket handling, and working in the concession area popping popcorn, pouring drinks, and assisting customers' needs.

**Aviation.** I have a private pilot certificate and fly regularly in my spare time. I am currently studying in the aviation management program at Guilford Technical Community College in Greensboro, North Carolina. I have an internship at the local branch of Landmark Aviation, which is a nationwide aircraft charter company. Besides helping out at Landmark, I also wash and wax aircraft at the local flight school to make their airplanes look spic-and-span for customers. With my internship at Landmark Aviation and work at the local flight school, I hope to build upon my experiences to gain more knowledge of the aviation industry. My goal is to own and manage my own airport.

I feel like CIP helped me in many ways because I am now able to live without my parents or other assistance in various areas. I've improved greatly in a variety of ways: cooking, cleaning, social, and financial. CIP's services have helped me become independent, live happily, and become the person who I am today. ■

Jay Mikush has two siblings and a dog named Banjo. He loves skiing, riding roller coasters, flying airplanes, mobile DJing, biking, singing, karaoke, swimming, hanging out with friends, and listening to and writing music.

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