

CELEBRATING

Mississippians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Will Parker's story

A young man from Morton had a unique opportunity this legislative session to serve as a page for Rep. Tom Miles in the Mississippi House of Representatives. While he was one of several young people who may serve as a page at any given time, Will Parker was doing so despite the challenges he faces. Will has a diagnosis of Creatine Transporter Deficiency Syndrome, which presents symptoms that can include intellectual delays, expressive speech and language delays, and movement disorders. It is a label that his mother, Melissa, knows he will carry the rest of his life. Even so, she said that Will and her family don't care if others know that he has a disability, because he's shown what he can do. "This week, he's a page and the other pages don't see that label either," she said. "He's just a kid with goofy socks wanting to help."



Melissa said that her family spent years without knowing a proper diagnosis or what kind of services and supports he needed. They didn't find that out until he was 12-years-old, even though they knew he was facing significant challenges since he was around five. She remembers the first time she was told he would have a disability throughout his life and how that completely stunned her; this wasn't something from which he could recover or catch up to other children his age. "When you're a parent and you get that news, there are a thousand - scratch that, a million - things running through your mind," Melissa said. "Life as you know it makes a massive shift. And you can watch it or be part of it, but either way it will shift."

She said she's learned a lifetime of information about insurance, Medicaid, and how to fill out forms since then. But she also has learned what her son is capable of. He spends time working at a coffee shop and he works at a flower shop, delivering his creations to a nursing home. While serving as a page, he enjoyed a little friendly competition with Rep. Miles over who had the most colorful and fun socks. They have also recently learned Will also has a talent for photography. "Regardless of the craziness our lives can be with a special needs child, I've learned that life with Will is just the most normal thing this world has going," Melissa said. "He's happy . . . everyday. He has his moments, but so do I. So do you. And that label? He doesn't care about that and doesn't care if you know it or not. We learned this year that he's a photographer. Just look what he did. His world is seen through a special lens...the one without the label."



Photography by Will Parker



Celebrating Mississippians with
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities