

Celebrating Disability Awareness Month *Cultivating Inclusion*

In Indiana, March is Disability Awareness Month. This week, we introduce you to Jimmy and Oliver, two of Tangram's clients who both came from an institution and are proving that life on the outside is happier and healthier. We hope you enjoy this issue. Please spread awareness about Disability Awareness Month by cultivating inclusion in your daily life.

From Surviving to Thriving

If there is one thing that Tangram knows from experience, it is that there is a big difference between *being alive* and *living*. Meet two gentlemen who are *living*. Jimmy (pictured top left) and Oliver Thomas (affectionately known as OT at the Tangram office—pictured bottom right) both once lived in an institutional setting before coming to Tangram.

Jimmy has been with Tangram for 4 years. When he came to Tangram, he had some negative behaviors, but according to his manager, he has turned himself around. "He is just a happy go-lucky guy," says his manager, Creshendo. Jimmy lives with 2 roommates and he gets along well with them. He enjoys singing,

drawing, and bowling. One of his favorite things to do is to go on long walks. It doesn't matter what time of year it is or what the weather is like, Jimmy is always in the mood for a walk. Jimmy works with a music therapist on learning the keyboard. He is pictured above at a Christmas concert, playing the keyboard. Jimmy is just one example of the positive outcomes that one can achieve when given the proper supports.

OT makes everyone smile. He was once a resident in an institutional setting, like Jimmy. Because of the regimented nature of an institution, OT was never given a chance to make his own decisions or learn all the skills that are necessary for life in the community.



The President's Pen

Dear Friends,
After chipping away at the ice that virtually encased Central Indiana for a few weeks, and dealing with on-again off-again winter weather, I longingly look ahead to the milder temperatures of spring and the breezy, balmy days of summer (a glimpse of which we got last week). Of course, this ice causes me to think of other things, too, such as safety and accessibility. I, like many pedestrians, had a few "close-calls" on the ice.

3 weeks after the big ice storm, we had only just started to experience a meltdown. For a long time, parking lots and sidewalks looked and felt more like treacherous skating rinks than places to walk and drive. This isn't just a safety issue; it is also an accessibility issue. I know, from experience, it's hard to walk on ice; imagine what it is like for those who use wheelchairs.

Just as the city of Indianapolis and other cities and towns are finding out in the aftermath of "Snowpocalypse 2011" the costs of making things accessible and safe for everyone in the winter are high. At Tangram, we do our best to make sure that people are not snow- or ice-bound in their homes and get to work immediately to clear snow and solve other winter weather-related problems.

It is so important for us to recognize accessibility issues and work to remedy them. We continue to see that accessibility benefits not only those with disabilities, but everyone.

There is no time like the present to advocate for those with disabilities, especially since it is Disability Awareness Month. Each week this month, we will bring you success stories from the individuals we are so fortunate to know and serve. Enjoy!

However, if you met OT today, you would never know that he had once led a life of limited independence. OT is a proud homeowner and lives with the same two roommates that he has lived with since getting out of the institution. Once a smoker, he has given up the habit and he is losing weight due to the healthier eating choices he makes.

OT (pictured at left) is a huge Colts fan. He is currently working on renovating his house and makes many of the decisions regarding the look of his house. He loves to explore the community and works 3 days a week. OT participates in music therapy and is starting to reconnect with his family, from whom he was separated when he lived in an institution.



Both Jimmy and OT know what it means to thrive. They have each made great strides since coming to Tangram and they continue to grow each day with the support of their staff and their own determination to *live*.

If you would like to know how you can get involved with Tangram, please visit our website: www.thetangramway.org. Watch your inbox for next week's story about a man who is "working for the King" and a woman who has lost weight so she can wear a bikini!