

Nominee: Joshua Leiker

Organization: Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas

DSNWK staff would like to nominate Joshua Leiker for the award of Outstanding Personal Growth.

Nomination Narrative:

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Joshua Leiker for the Outstanding Personal Growth Award. Joshua's journey over the past few years has been filled with difficulties that he's overcome and grown from. His story shows what an individual with developmental disabilities can achieve.

In 2021, at the age of 33, Joshua faced a pivotal moment when his mother, his primary caregiver, was hospitalized. This event necessitated Joshua's first move away from home, marking a significant transition in his life. Despite the anxiety and uncertainty, Joshua moved into his own apartment and began utilizing supported living services. This period was incredibly challenging for Joshua, who had major social anxiety. His anxiety was so severe that he was unable to even cut his own food in restaurants due to his hands shaking nervously, requiring his mother's assistance.

Initially, Joshua found it difficult to trust anyone other than his mother and his case manager. He frequently contacted them to express his concerns, often exaggerating situations out of fear and distrust towards the support staff. However, with time and consistent effort from his support team, Joshua's perspective began to shift. After about a year, the staff began to gain his trust, and Joshua started to open up to their guidance. He allowed them to teach him essential life skills, including shopping, cooking, and cleaning, which significantly boosted his independence and confidence.

Joshua's progress extended beyond his personal life to his professional endeavors. He works diligently on the DSNWK wood shop crew, where they refurbish old furniture, and also at the Custom Creations store, where the refurbished furniture is sold. Through these roles, Joshua has not only honed his craftsmanship but also made remarkable strides in overcoming his social anxiety. Interacting with the public was once a source of immense stress for Joshua, but he has gradually learned to manage these interactions with growing confidence.

A standout moment in Joshua's journey occurred last year during a DSNWK fundraiser at the Custom Creations store. The event was crowded with donors and DSNWK management staff, and Joshua was asked to stand in front of the group to answer

some questions. Demonstrating his newfound confidence, Joshua was able to give great answers and impressed the group. This achievement was a significant milestone for Joshua, who was extremely proud of his ability to stand in front of a crowd and communicate effectively.

Joshua Leiker's journey is an inspiring example of what can be achieved with determination, support, and a positive mindset. His transformation from a young man overwhelmed by social anxiety to a confident individual capable of speaking in public and living independently is remarkable.

In recognition of his extraordinary journey, I am honored to nominate Joshua Leiker for the Outstanding Personal Growth Award. His story is a testament to the power of support and the incredible potential within every individual.

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I have reviewed and agreed to the criteria for filming the awards video.

I have obtained approval for this nomination from the submitting agency's Executive Director.