



MISSION MOMENTS

...made possible by YOU!

Advancing Self-Advocacy

For Tangram, a good outcome is empowering someone to be an advocate for themselves and to live actively and independently as a member of their community. A great outcome is when that same person advocates for others and helps build the type of community that they want to be part of.

Clarissa is a young woman who represents the types of great outcomes we aim for at Tangram. In May, she attended the “Charting the Life Course Showcase” in Kansas City—a first of its kind event that used the Life Course framework to explore innovative strategies being used across the US to support individuals with disabilities and their families.

Clarissa has a passion for helping those with autism and other disabilities. As Vice President of Tangram’s Self-Advocates, she was interested in attending this conference to gain a better understanding of practices being used in other communities so she could bring this knowledge back to the other self-advocates.

The two day conference and two days of travel encompassed a lot of personal milestones for Clarissa. It was the first time she had ever traveled on a plane and the first time she had been away from home.

Lisa Cross, Tangram’s Community Integration Manager and Clarissa’s travel companion for the trip said, “I’m really proud of Clarissa and her accomplishments—especially because she was so independent and confident. She attended several breakout sessions and learned a lot from other attendees. She even shared her personal story as part of a discussion during a breakout session. Now she can’t wait to pass on what she learned!”

What really resonated with Clarissa was how communities are more vibrant and supportive when everyone works together and recognizes the strengths of each individual, including the contributions of individuals with disabilities. “It’s important to be strong and confident and build a community where people can be independent,” she stated.

Clarissa returned from the conference and has since been sharing what she learned with self-advocates and with others she meets. Taking what she learned from breakout sessions on employment, including self-employment, Clarissa has been exploring ways the possibility of selling her artwork. She has also been teaching painting classes to other Tangram clients at local parks. But her primary goal? She wants to help the community understand, appreciate, and embrace people with disabilities. “People with autism and other disabilities are just as valuable as other people,” she explains with a smile.



Clarissa at the Life Course Conference in Kansas City

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