

Jimmie Lehto – Balance is Everything



Good balance is important – whether it's on the ski slopes or in daily life. And Dryden resident Jimmie Lehto seems to be getting the hang of it!

Jimmie came to Unity House in May of 2006. After graduating from BOCES with his individualized education program (IEP) diploma that June, Jimmie sought employment. He has held several different jobs, including positions at WalMart and Ithaca College. He now works at Finger Lakes Fresh, a division of Challenge Industries in Ithaca which uses a workforce of employees with disabilities to provide high quality, local vegetables grown year-round in a hydroponics greenhouse. Jimmie has been there almost a year and really enjoys his work.

During his time with Unity House, Jimmie has struggled with non-epileptic seizures, yet in recent months has had excellent reports from his neurologist with no episodes. "Jimmie has made great progress in managing his seizures and meds," said Dryden Residence Counselor Shaena Anderson. "Since coming to Unity House, Jimmie has become increasingly responsible and is now able to administer his own meds with weekly supervision. He has been error-free with this, which is very encouraging and a big ego boost."

According to Shaena, Jimmie is a fun, caring, and active person who enjoys sports and spending time with his family. In fact, he just took up skiing through the nearby Greek Peak Adaptive Snowsports Program, which teaches skiing to those with disabilities. Their goal is to make the mountain and the excitement of snowsports available to everyone.

"It's not that easy," says Jimmie. "You fall a lot but it's something different." Jimmie got interested in the program through one of his housemates – they go weekly and take lessons with a specially trained coach. "It's good for balance. I'm staying on the easiest slopes this year, and will hit the blue [intermediate] runs next year."

In addition to fun on the ski hill, Jimmie set a goal to get his driver's permit, and was successful last June. Now he's signed up for a driver's education class and is studying to getting his license. Jimmie also enjoys break dancing at local dances, and recently started doing his own independent grocery shopping. Because he's doing so well, Jimmie will soon transfer into a supportive living apartment in Ithaca, where he will live independently with regularly scheduled support visits from Unity House staff. In anticipation of that exciting life change, Jimmie is shopping for a couch for his new pad.

"While he's still learning to balance everything himself, Jimmie has made amazing progress at Unity House," said Shaena. "I hope that he will continue to strive for success and accomplish all of his goals and dreams."