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Past Achievement Grant Awards

Who Have We Supported?

As an organization, we strive to recognize and support the achievement of individuals with a variety of disabilities and activities. To us, it isn't about how disabled you are, but rather how you decide to handle the hand that you are dealt. Any person can reap the benefits of hard work, and it is our goal to give those displaying a genuine effort a chance for success.

Take a look at those who have received a Think Alive Achievement Grant. They are already a diverse group of hard working individuals, who with our help, are staying active while pursuing the passions they love. In the future as we award more grants, we only anticipate more and more different types of goals and disabilities to adolescents nationwide and, hopefully down the road globally.

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[Austin Handley](#)

RISING PARALYMPIC ATHLETE



Name: Austin Handley

Age: 19

Disability: Cerebral Palsy

Hometown: Madison, South Dakota

Partner Organization: U.S Paralympic Track and Field

Activity: Paralympic 1500m Run

What He Received: Moving Stipend for Olympic Residency Program

Austin Handley's journey as a Paralympic medal hopeful began with a failed attempt to enlist in the military. It was at that point a medical test revealed that he had Cerebral Palsy. When he heard about his diagnosis that he had had since birth, Austin simply laughed. He said, "All I could do is laugh. I had just won my fifth state championship. I knew I was still able to compete with the best runners in the state." Indeed, the most amazing thing was that, Austin was still able to succeed athletically in a sport that he had turned to. After high school, Austin followed his love for running to Southwest Minnesota State where he has run for the past year.

Austin cited his experience at Nationals this past year, where he won the 1500m run for his classification with a smoking time of 4:30 as a huge bump in his Paralympic dream. He was recently accepted into the Olympic Residency Program where he will live and train full-time in Chula Vista, CA with support of National Coaches. Next on his horizon are the World Championships in November 2015.

This Achievement Grant will help him with moving expenses associated with his move to California.

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Name: Mackenzie Gilchrist
Age: 5
Disability: ADHD, PTSD
Hometown: Hyde Park, Massachusetts
Partner Organization: Boston SPEDPAC
Activity: Gymnastics
What She Received: (2) 10 week-sessions of Gymnastics lessons and the necessary equipment and costumes

Young Mackenzie has been asking to participate in gymnastics over the past year. Now, as both a reward for progressing in school and an opportunity her own personal growth, she will have that chance thanks to an Achievement Grant.

She has been in physical therapy for some time to learn ways to express herself more, and Mackenzie's mother believes that gymnastics will only help her with her patience and skill-building as she matures. "Gymnastics is challenging her apart of her disability!" she says. "I feel that continuing to work with her therapist and also doing the classes will help her to recognize patience and repetitive practice."

The Achievement Grant she received will cover an entire school year's worth of gymnastics lessons, the equipment, costumes, and proper attire she needs to be one of the many children going to gymnastics regularly.

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Sydney Collier



Name: Sydney Collier
Age: 15
Disability: Wyburn-Mason Syndrome
Hometown: Ann Arbor, Michigan
Partner Organization: n/a
Activity: Para-Dressage
What She Received: Personalized Workout Program and Training to Prepare for Paralympics

Part Paralympic hopeful, part inspiring disability advocate, Sydney may only be 15, but she has actively pursuing the highest levels of Para-Dressage for 3 full years. She has even become the youngest qualifier in her respective national show, the Para Equestrian Dressage National Championships.

The perpetual challenge of dressage draws Sydney to it. She reflects, "You are always working towards perfection, [and] true harmony between horse and rider, but no one has ever achieved that elusive 100% score. It is pursuit towards her own perfection that has kept her in the sport at the highest levels.

To help overcome the physical challenges association with her juvenile strokes, this Achievement Grant will allow Syd to develop a personal training regimen. She aims to design such a program that compliments and expands her riding abilities by targeting a weakness-core strength-and making it strength.

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Christopher Drewniak



Name: Christopher Drewniak
Age: 21
Disability: Downs Syndrome
Hometown: Ludlow, Massachusetts
Partner Organization: Stavros Center for Independent Living
Activity: Music
What He Received: Partial Scholarship to Berkshire Hills Music Academy

Christopher Drewniak is a young music lover set to attend "Broadway Camp" at Berkshire Hills Music Academy later this summer. There, he "cannot wait to participate in chorus, ensembles, and skits." He is looking forward to his tremendous upcoming fun experiences while staying in college dorms for the very first time!

The great camp will also be a tremendous opportunity for Christopher to practice his speech skills on his own, while conversing and developing friendships with a multitude of new people. His mother anticipates that he will also be given the chance to try new activities and experience new things throughout the entire two week camp.

Without the financial support of an Achievement Grant, this would not have been possible.

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Rebecca Massoni

Name: Rebecca Massoni
Age: 21
Disability: Developmental Delay
Hometown: Westfield, Massachusetts



Partner Organization: Stavros Center for Independent Living
Activity: Summer Activity Club
What She Received: Tuition for a 7-Week Community Activity Club

"Becky" Massoni is a very active person who loves all sorts of activities. In the past, she has explored and competed with the Special Olympics. But no matter the activity, she "hates sitting down."

This summer and fall, that will not be a problem in the least. Thanks to her Achievement Grant, Becky will be exploring local communities alongside her peers. She, "in particular is looking forward to her first trip to the Bronx Zoo," according to her mother. With the Activity Club, run and managed through Multicultural Community Services, Becky will also go on hikes and even spend the night in the Science Center.

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[Azaire Cummings](#)

Name: Azaire Cummings

Age: 12

Disability: Autism

Hometown: Randolph, Massachusetts

Partner Organization: Agassiz Village/ ID Camps

Activity: Summer Camps

What He Received: Full Tuition to Two-Week Specialized Summer Camp

In need of a fun activity to explore this summer, Azaire Cummings is certainly looking forward to attending summer camp after school ends. He put it best when he told his mother, "Who wouldn't want to go to camp, AND they [even] have archery. This should be the best camp ever!" He went on to suggest that anything to the contrary would not simply make sense.

Born with Autism, Azaire will be able to kayak, swim, and participate other outdoor recreational activities while socializing with his peers, something that he struggles with, according to his mother. With this Achievement Grant, however, he will have the tools and life experience exploring his own abilities.

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[Justin Williams](#)

Name: Justin Williams

Age: 7

Disability: Autism and Developmental Delay

Hometown: Dorchester, Massachusetts

Partner Organization: Super Soccer Stars

Activity: Soccer

What He Received: A Full Season of Introductory Soccer Classes

Justin just moved to Massachusetts from New York with his mother, who describes him as "shy." When he does not understand the instructions of physical activities he becomes easily withdrawn, according to her.

But he has a strong passion for soccer and a big imagination. When asked what he enjoys most about the sport, he said that he "likes running like Sonic the Hedge Hog making the ball in the net."

But he does not want fear to hold him back from doing what he loves. With an Achievement Grant from Think Alive, Justin will be able to participate in classes at Super Soccer, which offers individualized staff support for children with disabilities. This way, he will be able to get the additional support he needs to improve. And this will give him the chance to build his confidence and make friends as he adjusts to his new setting. His condition will not stand in the way of him reaching his goals.

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[Jacob Shahrouzi](#)

Name: Jacob Shahrouzi

Age: 9

Disability: Non-Verbal Autism and Motor Coordination Disorder

Hometown: Brighton, Massachusetts

Partner Organization: Loon Mountain

Activity: Skiing

What He Received: Adaptive Skiing Season Pass

Jacob just loves snow. He began skiing a short time ago and fell in love with the sport. He went to Loon Mountain twice last year and did really well with quality personal instruction. He started by merely striving to stand on his skis, and then began to build his balance to tackle the mountain.

The activity also builds confidence and coordination, helping to overcome certain aspects of his diagnosis. According to his mother, "it helps him focus and to be calm for other more favorable activities." Plus, he can enjoy the thrills of speeding down the slopes.

"Skiing is great for Jacob because it provides a great tool and is a wonderful source of Occupational Therapy," she wrote to Think Alive. "The smile of his face is as bright as the sun shine when he is skiing."

But the problem with skiing is that it is very expensive, and pushes the budget for almost every skier. With an Achievement Grant from Think Alive, Jacob will be able to ski far more than he did last year.

