**Episode 3: Chris**

**HOST**: This is Autism Points of View by Autism Speaks. I’m Felipe Maya. Welcome to Autism Points of View. If you didn’t know April is World Autism Month. A time when Autism Speaks invites friends and neighbors around the world to come together to pledge to Light It Up Blue to increase global understanding and acceptance of people with autism. Join us by pledging your support for a more inclusive world at autismspeaks.org/WAM. During World Autism Month, Autism Speaks spotlights the stories of individuals on the autism spectrum and we’ll be telling some of those stories on this podcast.

This episode focuses on Chris, a 27-year-old-man thriving in his career and flourishing with his independence - something his parents were told may never be possible.

**BILL**: He’s a young man who started out and all the experts told us he was going to have some real struggles. I don’t think they ever thought he would get his high school diploma, or have a job, or drive a car or…

**MARCI**: live independently

**BILL**: Yeah. Lives on his own.

**MARCI**: in an apartment. You know, he’s on his own. He’s doing a really good job.

**BILL**: We go to Florida for months at a time and he’s perfectly fine on his own.

**HOST**: Bill and Marci Ingram, Chris’ parents.

**BILL**: He started at a high school, it was a charter school. And, they were able to accommodate some of his behaviors that he wasn’t getting in the public schools. And you know he passed his tests to get his degree from Ohio high school – a degree. And he has some skills. He’s very good at math and I think that’s the first one he passed, wasn’t it? And a lot of the other kids there had trouble with math but were good in other things so I think he probably helped some of them out, at least the math part. We were told he would have a difficult time passing those kinds of standardized tests.

He’s a really hard worker. He’s very perseverant. If he wants to do something, it usually gets done. Now, we didn’t really want him to drive but he started studying for the written exam and he finally got through it and passed it and then passed the actual driving exam. So, we were not really high on that, but that’s what he wanted to do so we couldn’t stop him.

**MARCI**: So, we took a chance. You know we took a chance and I think you know with a lot of the hurdles there have been a lot of things that we thought “this doesn’t sound like a good idea.” But, when he wants to do it – we took a chance. We said “OK, let’s give it a try let’s put a safety net under that and, see what we can do to make it happen.”

**HOST**: Like all young people learning to drive was Chris’ first step towards independence.

**INTERVIEWER**: Your mom and dad yesterday couldn’t get over how independent you’ve become. Is that something you’re proud of? Can you talk about how proud you are of yourself?

**CHRIS**: Well, I’m proud of the fact that I’m able to drive a car on my own and go from place to place, and go to my appointments.

**HOST**: Heather, Chris’ life coach.

**HEATHER**: The development of life skills is phenomenally important, and I think that is pivotal to Chris’ success. Even when he was a child and we were home schooling. I vividly remember teaching him how to make a grilled cheese sandwich independently, and we would take pictures of each step and we made books that were pictures and I had him write sentences describing what he was doing. Then he would take the book upstairs and use it and flip through the pages as he was making it till the point that he could make it himself. So we did a lot of those kinds of tasks, but even as he’s grown and even the programming he attended as an adult, was also very pivotal in teaching him a lot of those skills. So we do things on a weekly basis like talking about his finances. We have a spread sheet. He has a budget. He has to record his expenses in that spread sheet and we review it. He knows he has to stay within his budget. We talk about that. His parents have access to it. They can see it, I can see it and we can all communicate about it. We also work on things that require a lot of strategies like how do you know what time to leave your house in the morning? So that you can get to work on time. And, what kinds of things do you have to think about. Like did it snow? Is it raining? Are you leaving at a different time there might be more or less traffic, things like that. So, those kinds of problem-solving things we do very, very routinely.

**HOST**: Duncan, Chris’ swim coach.

**DUNCAN**: So, over the 6 months that I’ve worked with him he was pretty shy at first right when I met him and, every week he’s warmed up to me more and more as we’ve done more intense stuff. I really think it’s helped him grow a lot. I can see that with how he talks to me. About what he’s doing outside of training. Chris, he’s determined so, whatever workout I’ve got up on the board, sometimes it looks intimidating to people, but I run through the same thing I do with everyone else, with him. I might say, “We’ve got a 400 yard set coming up right here” and he’ll look at me like OK. And, then he’ll get through it you know. And then, I think he impresses himself.

**CHRIS**: Being independent is pretty important, because like sooner or later all of us will have to learn it, one way or the other.

**HOST**: Brian Barnett, Chris’ supervisor.

**BRIAN**: I absolutely believe Chris has been able to become successful, and I believe he has yet to achieve his full potential at this point in his life. He’s got a lot of opportunity where he can still take on additional roles and responsibility, and it’s up to me as his manager to find the right things for him to do. We continue to think outside the box – we’re an innovated group. I believe he’s in the right capacity and right function to continue to grow professionally. He has a lot to offer. But I focus on keeping his learning structured. I don’t want to overwhelm him with too much, so his success rests in his own hands as it does for all of us, but it’s important for me to have the ability to nurture that and find the right opportunity for him. He’s definitely been able to be successful in being an autistic colleague. I think working with David has helped. But I do think it has a lot to do with finding the right job, the right segment, the right manager to promote that.

**HOST:** Chris continues to defy the odds and prove that with the right support system, the sky’s the limit. Autism Speaks offers free resources for families planning for their child’s transition to adulthood as well as a directory to quickly find supports and services in your area. Visit autismspeaks.org/podcasts to download those resources and make sure to subscribe to Autism Points of View to get updates and new episodes.

This episode was written by James Fitzpatrick and edited by Dax Schaffer. I’m Felipe Maya. Thanks for listening.