



## *Jerome's Story*

"I want people to realize that I want the same things that people without disabilities want from life." This statement captures Jerome's philosophy on life and self-determination.

In the 1960's and 1970's, Jerome lived most of his adolescent and teenage years in an institution for people with developmental disabilities. While he was not unhappy, he did not have a place he called home. At 18, he left the institution and moved in with his family.

Due to his cerebral palsy and other health issues, his family was unable to keep him home and he was sent to a group home. For Jerome, this situation was less than ideal, due to little freedom, roommates he did not know, and complete reliance on other people for his care.

Even in this restrictive environment, Jerome succeeded in finding various types of employment. After a job at Wachovia, he became a file clerk at a doctor's office for two and a half years. He furthered his resume by volunteering and then by securing a lucrative job processing books at the Columbia Bible College Library, where he worked for 10 years.

Throughout the years, Jerome has traveled to almost all of the 50 states. His favorite past-time is traveling by bus; among his favorites is a cross-country trip to Seattle, Washington because he met "so many new people." Jerome believes traveling to be relaxing and reducing stress. He mentions that "the moment I got on the bus, my stress level went down."

His traveling adventures illustrate Jerome's determined attitude that can be traced even to his childhood years when he was told he "couldn't do nothing." Approximately 6 years ago, Jerome began advocating for himself to move out of the group home and into his own apartment, so he could live in the community like people without disabilities. A year ago, this determination finally became a reality; he signed a lease with his apartment complex, has hired his own staff, created a schedule that works with his own needs, and facilitates his circle of support meetings with new found leadership. He enjoys the area he lives in, which is convenient to the mall and most importantly, the movie theater which he frequently visits. Jerome enjoys having his own apartment and does not foresee himself moving any time in the near future. Aside from relying on his disability income, he is working at Starbuck's passing out samples to customers as they walk in the store. He enjoys working at Starbuck's and is currently advocating for an increase in hours.

He is heavily involved in his church as a born again believer and is always on the go doing different activities. His pastor and a friend who attends his church are members of his circle of support and have assisted him in many ways. Jerome has wanted to own an accessible van for a long time. Unfortunately, he is unable to purchase a vehicle with his limited income. In May 2008, the church accepted a donation for an accessible van and is in the process of inserting a captain's chair which will allow members of the church to drive Jerome to and from church activities.

Jerome is also very active in various self-advocacy boards, quality assurance boards, and micro-boards for numerous organizations and agencies. He is involved in speaking engagements across the Carolinas, always willing to share his story, beliefs for self-determination and self-advocacy to disability groups and other governmental agencies. Jerome has built a strong circle of friends who support him in achieving his dreams of continuing to live independently in the community, working to earn income, and giving back to the community in which he lives.