

Bickman celebrates his freedom

FIRST IN MERCER COUNTY TO HAVE RIGHTS RESTORED

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Joseph Bickman of Burgin made local history February when he became the first adult with an intellectual disability in Mercer County to have his rights restored.

Imagine becoming an adult and not having the right to basic self-determination. Bickman didn't have to imagine this. The commonwealth decided where he lived and what he did with his time. However, with help from his foster family, Bickman became the first local to win his independence.

"It was a first in Mercer County," said Bickman's foster father, Walt Barbour. "Joseph is now part of a support decision making team."

Barbour, who is an advocate for supported decision making, met Bickman through his work at a Lexington Day treatment facility called Employment Solutions.

"He was unhappy with his living environment and it was creating behavior issues," Barbour recalled. "He is a young man who loves to be outside and he was living in

a staffed residence with older gentlemen. It just wasn't the right fit."

Barbour said Bickman was kept heavily medicated and his activity was limited.

"He couldn't go outside due to the busy area surrounding the house," Barbour said. "We started taking him home with us on the weekends and things developed from there."

After becoming a foster family for Bickman, the Barbours started petitioning the state to restore his rights.

"We received help from the Kentucky Department for Advocacy," Barbour said. "It was a long process and we were denied the first time."

Bickman is now able to make decisions as part of a supported decision making team. It gives the individual more control over their own life while also protecting them. The University of Kentucky has created a regional program with support from the National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making.

Bickman is originally from Russia and was two when he was adopted. His adoptive family resides in Winchester.



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Joseph Bickman is the first person with intellectual disabilities in Mercer County to have his rights restored. "I feel like I have full control over my life now," Bickman said.

"We have a great working relationship with his adoptive parents," Barbour said. "They are very supportive of Joseph's decisions."

Barbour said Bickman is no longer on any medications. He is extremely social and busy with his life in Burgin.

"I feel like I have full control over my life now," Bickman said. "I know I still have to ask permission

and be respectful of how things work, but I like having rights."

Bickman is currently working part-time in cardboard production and loves to listen to music and drive his golf cart.

"I like my life," said Bickman, who has fallen in love with Lake Herrington since moving in with the Barbour family. "I like rights and I like it here."