

“Turning Struggles into Strength: Jamie’s Journey of Resilience and Self-Acceptance”

Jamie Duplechine is an OCDD Self-Direction New Opportunities Waiver (NOW) Participant



Lafayette native Jamie Duplechine was left with high cervical level (C4-5) quadriplegia after a life-altering vehicle accident at age 15 where doctors told her she would never walk again.

C4-5 quadriplegia, also known as incomplete quadriplegia, is a spinal cord injury that caused Jamie to lose the use of her arms and legs. But despite this devastating physical setback, Jamie took an optimistic view: “I don’t like it when people say how nice it is that I’ve accepted my disability. I didn’t accept my disability; I adjusted to it — mostly my attitude,” she said.

Jamie, who is now in her 40s, has not walked since the day of the accident. Jamie’s goal was to live a life without limits, and a life with dignity. She learned to get around in her

motorized wheelchair, equipped with a sip-and-puff system that allows her to drive the wheelchair with her mouth and her breath. With the support of her parents, she went away to college at 17. She also spent time living in London, England and traveling through Europe for several months in her early twenties. Jamie credits her family and support system for allowing her to live a normal life—including giving her the right to make her own mistakes, and the dignity to take risks.

Part of what has helped Jamie remain independent is her participation in the Office of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities’ (OCDD) [New Opportunities Waiver](#) (NOW). Many people with Jamie's physical limitations are placed in nursing homes because of the high level of care they need for their everyday activities. However, self-direction in the NOW offers Jamie the opportunity to hire her own direct service workers to assist with day-to-day activities without a traditional provider agency. This includes self-care, toileting, bathing, cooking, cleaning, mobility and transportation.

“I’ve been able to live on my own, in my own home, and make my own decisions for years through programs that OCDD has provided and for that, I’m very grateful,” Jamie said. “OCDD services and programs are my lifeline. My caretakers are to me as your arms and legs are to you. They do everything for me.”

As Jamie continued to fight for inclusion, she discovered the Miss Wheelchair pageant, a national platform for women with disabilities to feel beautiful while shining a light on the disabled community. Jamie was crowned Miss Wheelchair Louisiana in 2015 and was the third runner-up to

Miss Wheelchair America in 2017. With her pageant platform “Self-Acceptance: A Direct Invitation to a Life without Limits,” Jamie highlighted her struggles and the importance of adaptability and perseverance. She featured the [“Boy and the Butterfly” story](#) to help further spread her message of embracing challenges and overcoming barriers.

Participating in the pageants sparked in Jamie a love for advocacy and creating change in the disability community. She currently serves as the chapter coordinator for People First of Louisiana, a self-advocacy organization run by individuals with disabilities. She also serves as secretary of Louisiana’s Statewide Independent Living Council; is a board member of the Consumer Advisory Committee for LSU’s Human Development Center; and is an honorary board member of the Brain Injury Association of Louisiana and the United Spinal Association Louisiana Chapter.

Jamie’s story is a testament to the transformative power of self-acceptance, adaptability, and perseverance, and also an example of the effectiveness of programs like the NOW waiver. As she continues to champion inclusivity and empowerment within the disability community, Jamie’s impact serves as a reminder that true strength lies in embracing the journey, however challenging it may be.

“The majority of the limits we put on ourselves are the ones we create,” Jamie said. “Faced with [challenging] situations in life, a lot of times people just complain and don’t ever do anything about it. If you can’t accept something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude about it.”

Jamie’s List of Accolades, Committees, and Awards:

- Honorary Board Member of BIALA/United Spinal Association
- Arc of Louisiana’s Advocate of the Year, 2020
- Lilian Walker Advocate of the Year, 2019
- SILC Outstanding Advocate Award, 2019
- Peer Mentor Certification – United Spinal Association, 2017
- Miss Wheelchair USA, 2017
 - Runner Up
 - Creativity Award – Most Creative Costume
 - Mona Johansson Spirit of Life Award
- Governor’s Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities – Patsy Barret Award, 2016
- Governor’s Outstanding Leadership in Disabilities Participation Award, 2016
- Outstanding Individual with a Disability, 2016
- Very Special Miss Louisiana – Participation
- Miss Wheelchair Louisiana – America, 2015
- Peer and Family Support Mentor – Christopher & Reeves Foundation, 2015

