

Dear Mathews,

When Jimmie came to our school in second grade he had been home schooled all his life and had severe learning disabilities. By the time he was in fourth grade he was pretty much mute by choice. He walked the halls with his head down and never spoke without prompting. When asked a question, he might answer with a single word, but would never make eye contact, and remained "hunkered down," trying to disappear.

Then we began the Archery in the Schools Program and an after-school archery club. I wanted Jimmie to be independent, yet I was skeptical and stayed near him in case he needed extra assistance. To my immediate surprise, I noticed Jimmy wasn't shooting like everybody else... he was blowing them away! After explaining the shot sequence, I stepped back, and he grouped all five shots HIS FIRST TIME ON THE LINE! Needless to say, the kids went WILD! Our other coach, Mark, walked next to him to pat him on the back and he flinched away...it was as if he didn't know how to accept praise. He had been flying under the radar for so long, he thought he was invisible.



Archery changed Jimmy. He became the top shooter the FIRST week and we shortly began to see a number of changes in him. We saw him interact with children during practice. They were giving him "high fives" and cheering for him, and he was thriving on it. He gradually became an "expert" in helping new participants - something he had never experienced in his young life. Other teachers began to observe changes in Jimmie, too. He was listening in class and responding when questioned. About two months later, he slowly raised his hand to ask a question - the first time he had ever voluntarily participated. The teachers in the room had to leave to hide the tears in their eyes.

A year later, Jimmy was doing better than ever, but we didn't know the extent of his progress until we received results of our state-mandated testing. Jimmie scored PROFICIENT (3 out of 4) on his Practical Living/Vocational Studies test and APPRENTICE (2 out of 4) on the remaining tested areas, compared to NOVICE (1 out of 4) in all areas the preceding year. Beyond the educational benefits, Jimmie now has friends and is one of the "heroes" on the archery team. He travels with them to competitions and raises his head to experience the world. He looks forward to the future and is talking about when he graduates.... GRADUATES... Jimmie is thinking about graduating from high school.... because of archery.

Sincerely,

Ronda Jordan Elam - Tompkinsville Elementary School