

From Tragedy to Triumph

Oluwaferanmi Okanlami (Feranmi) had a promising future ahead of him. He had graduated medical school from the University of Michigan in 2011 and was preparing to start the third year of his orthopedic surgical residency at Yale-New Haven Hospital. An incident that occurred on July 4, 2013, however, would forever alter his life. While attending a party on that date, Feranmi dove into a swimming pool and suffered a spinal cord injury that left him quadriplegic with no feeling from the middle of his chest down. Determined to overcome his barriers and



resume his goal to become a surgeon, he pushed himself in physical and occupational therapies to regain some mobility functioning. Within weeks of the accident, Feranmi was able to move his legs, and within time, he was able to begin transitioning from a wheelchair to a walker. While his movement was very slow, he was making more progress than his doctors had anticipated.

Feranmi wanted to continue the amazing progress he was experiencing, but found himself close to exhausting his insurance benefits to continue his rehabilitation. His physical therapist referred Feranmi to VR, and he was subsequently determined eligible for services in June of 2014. Through vocational counseling and guidance, Feranmi's counselor was able to identify several services that he would need in order to continue his medical training to achieve his goal of becoming a surgeon, which included physical restoration services, assistive technology, workplace accommodations, and mobility devices such as electronic and standing wheelchairs. As Feranmi's medical training and eventual employment progressed, his VR Counselor amended his Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) many times to meet his evolving needs.

Feranmi was offered a residency position at Memorial Hospital, in South Bend, Indiana, where he continues to work. He would like to return to the University of Michigan and assist people with physical disabilities be successful in medical school and, eventually, as medical professionals. Feranmi plans to discuss this with the State of Michigan's VR program. While he does not believe this will happen soon, it's definitely a long term goal that he is passionate about.

Feranmi's case is a perfect example of how a VR case can take different turns, necessitating frequent IPE evaluation and changes to meet evolving needs. Feranmi's confidence in his ability

to heal and be successful despite his challenges was inspiring. He never considered that there could be a limit to what his body could accomplish if he set his mind to it. As a counselor managing a high caseload, his successes were energizing. He was a wonderful reminder of the good work we do at VR and how being creative and open minded to someone's goals can result in tremendous outcomes and satisfaction for both the consumer and the counselor.

~ Submitted by Theresa Kaplon, Area Supervisor, South Bend