

Monthly tips and resources featured in **What's Next?** are created for young adults, their families, and supporters who are exploring options for life after high school in Indiana.

## Redefining Independence

Issue No. 14, October 20, 2021

**Seeing** life's possibilities is often one of the biggest challenges we have during the transition to living an adult life. It's hard to imagine what's past the horizon when you haven't been there yet. For that reason, let's talk to a couple of people in the know.

We're giving you the opportunity to ask questions of Adria Nassim and Michael Ely, two young adults with disabilities who are redefining what it means to live independently with supports. Read about them in this issue, and submit your questions to us at [CCLC@indiana.edu](mailto:CCLC@indiana.edu). **Deadline for submitting questions is November 12.** We'll print your questions and their answers in the December 2021 issue.

Adria and Michael are our co-workers here at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC). IIDC is the parent organization of the Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC), which publishes *What's Next?*

Read on for more information about Adria and Michael and what they do at IIDC.



### Adria Nassim

Originally from Floyd County, Indiana, Adria moved to Bloomington in 2008 to attend the College Internship Program (CIP), a private independent living skills program for young adults with autism spectrum disorders and learning disabilities. After graduating from CIP and from Brescia University in Kentucky, Nassim chose to make Bloomington her home with assistance from her service dog Thomas.

**Housing:** She lives in an apartment in downtown Bloomington, close to a small grocery store, restaurants, a

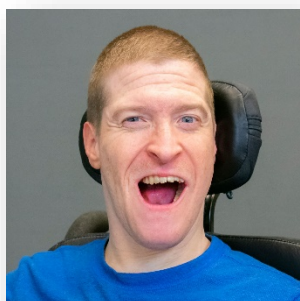
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walking trail, and the farmers' market. Lyft, Uber, the local access bus, and walking with Thomas get her from place to place. Swimming at the YMCA is her exercise of choice.

**Supports:** In addition to Thomas, Adria has a variety of people supports. Her parents have recently moved to the area. Direct support professionals (DSPs) from Stone Belt Arc, a local community service provider, help with cooking and laundry. The DSPs join Adria when she dines at restaurants, eats spicy food, checks out the coffee shops, and shouts out answers at trivia night. In a bit of a twist, though, Adria often recruits her own DSPs and then refers them to Stone Belt. Adria has a number of friends from a local sorority, some of whom have served as DSPs over the years.

**Employment:** IIDC hired Adria part-time in July 2017. As part of her work, she is a frequent guest presenter to college students learning about autism, learning disabilities, education, and psychology. Adria also writes the blog [Adria's Notebook](#) for CCLC. Her posts focus on issues related to living independently in a community as a young adult with disabilities.

**More Work and Other Activities:** In addition to her work with IIDC, Adria is a regular columnist with *The Herald-Times*, covering autism and disability-related issues. Currently, she serves on the board of directors for the Monroe County Autism Foundation. This year, Adria also completed training to become an advocacy ambassador with Autism Speaks. In that role, she communicates with state and federal legislators about issues that affect the disability community.



## Michael Ely

Born with cerebral palsy, Michael gets around in a power chair and uses augmentative and Eye Gaze communication technology. He uses Eye Gaze for his mouse and computer when he's working, as well as when he's at home.

**Housing:** Living in his own downtown Bloomington apartment gives Michael access to nearby walking trails, restaurants, and the farmers' market.

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**Supports:** In addition to providing transportation, Stone Belt Arc also helps Michael with all of his physical and safety needs. He shares staff with another Stone Belt client who lives down the hall. Michael's mother lives in the community and is also involved in arranging and advocating for supports.

**Employment:** Michael graduated in 2011 from Ivy Tech Community College with his associate's degree in computer information technology. In his part-time position, he helps IIDC staff create accessible documents and pdfs. Accessible documentation is an in-demand job skill, so training he received through the Institute is invaluable (to both Michael and to his IIDC colleagues). The Institute's Indiana Resource Center for Autism, for instance, uses images to create their social stories and visual supports for families and schools. Each of those images needs alternative text. Michael to the rescue.

**Volunteering and Activities:** Michael serves as president of Self-Advocates of Monroe County and designed the group's website. He's also assisted Stone Belt with newsletter layout, helped market produce to area restaurants for a community greenhouse where a number of Stone Belt clients worked, and served on the Stone Belt Board of Directors for four years.

When he's not working, Michael likes to go bowling; take walks outdoors when the weather's nice; and go out to see movies, especially comedies.

## Send Us Your Questions!

What would you like to know about how Adria and Michael make it work? You can ask them about:

- Housing
- Types of supports—people, assistive tech, animals, organizations, finances
- Employment
- Transportation
- What works
- What's still challenging

Address your questions to either Michael or Adria. Send them to [CCLC@indiana.edu](mailto:CCLC@indiana.edu). We'll make sure they receive them!

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## **Bonus Tip:** Family Employment Awareness Training Moves to November-December



Indiana high school students, young adults, families, and supporters are encouraged to register for virtual Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT), **November 30, December 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9**. Virtual sessions will take place at noon and will be repeated at 6 p.m. on each day for your convenience. For more information, see the [FEAT webpage](#) or [register now!](#)

**What's Next?** is a project of the Center on Community Living and Careers and the Indiana Department of Education.

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