

Parent to Parent



Therapy in Natural Environments

My name is Kimberly Rayfield and my son's name is Jymere. As a parent of a child with a disability, I know it's hard trying to get everything done in your day—no matter how hard we try we can't always do it. In trying to balance the needs of all of my children, I learned to incorporate new ideas about therapy. In Pennsylvania, early intervention services are provided in natural environments. Natural environments include not just the home but also places in the community that are part of family routines and where young children learn and play.

As a young child, Jymere's early intervention services were often provided in the community:

- Sometimes the physical therapist and I would take Jymere to the park while my older son, Darryl, practiced basketball
- When Darryl's games conflicted with Jymere's PT, we took the physical therapist with us to the gym, where we worked on positioning on the bleacher so that Jymere could watch the game and I could learn how to position Jymere
- The physical therapist also went with us to the supermarket to work on positioning in the cart while I shopped
- We scheduled therapy sessions at a local recreation center, where Jymere learned to ride his bike, play ball, and play with other children on the floor mats
- Jymere, his speech therapist, and I would also go to the library for the "reading for tots" program
- The three of us even went to McDonalds for lunch to work on Jymere's swallowing
- I used my membership at the *Please Touch Museum* to bring the occupational therapist and work on Jymere's sensory motor skills and stretching.

I encourage parents to utilize the resources that are in their community (natural environments) and incorporate them in their therapy sessions, which sometimes involves the whole family. When discussing options with your child's therapists speak from your heart on what you want your child to try to do or be able to do!

written by Kimberly Rayfield