

# ***American Dreaming: Mia Peterson***

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Mia Peterson, left, with Essie Pederson, Executive Director of Capabilities Unlimited, where Mia works

## **Leaving home**

Mia Peterson grew up in Iowa with her father, an insurance agent, her mother, a special education teacher, and two sisters, Missy, 27, a technical writer, and Jana, 21, a college student. She lives and works in Cincinnati.

*"I am the first of my sisters to live out of state. That is a very big honor, just to do that, that Mom and Dad would let me out of the house to do that. That's a big step, not just for me, but for the whole family. They knew that it was time that I started being independent and getting more experiences. I was scared, but I was very excited at the same time. Now my family members want to talk to me about how my life and career are going. Now I'm famous in my small town."*

Attending conferences made a big difference in Mia's life. There she met people who could see the potential in a girl who grew up shy but who had big dreams.

*"It was time that I fly out of the nest. It kind of took off, and I found the life that I wanted."*

## **School experiences**

*"My sister Jana went into the same high school as I did. It affected my thinking about what I wanted to do with my life, watching and listening to people talking to my sisters, watching my family and watching my friends and listening to them."*

Mia started speaking up for herself when she was in high school. She had always been in special education classes, but she decided she wanted to take other classes.

*"I told my teacher that there were some classes I wanted to be in, and I never got to be in those classes, journalism and especially chorus. That hurt my feelings. She said, 'The classes have already been put in the computer.' I didn't know how to tell her off. You know what I did? I wrote letters. In one of my letters I said, 'Put that into your computer!' It taught me a lesson to start thinking for myself for once. I learned that your answers to your problems won't get anywhere unless you do something about it first."*

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## **Future dreams**

Mia began to see a future for herself as a writer, living in a new place, getting to know more people. Although she knew she wanted to write, she was worried about how to get started. With support from her father, she began writing for a newspaper and got a job with a project about healthy life-styles for people with Down Syndrome.

## Creating a new life

Mia stays active in her Cincinnati neighborhood doing things she likes to do. This helps her find out what her interests are. In addition to work, she attends college.

*“I am taking interpersonal communications this semester [in college]. Next semester is going to be public speaking. I am just auditing, learning how I can take a grade. What I am doing now is taking the next step toward my career.”*

## Responsibilities

*“I have a lot of responsibilities, and I find it kind of difficult. I learned some things from Mom and Dad, tips of certain things that are responsibilities we got to know how to do, like taking care of yourself, taking care of your health so you won’t get sick, taking care of your teeth, taking care of your house, taking care of everything on your own instead of them doing it for you. They can’t do it for me. I’ve got to take that responsibility, showing them that I know my responsibilities. Just let me do it. That’s hard.”*

## Keep your dreams

*“Don’t let anyone take your dreams away, when you have a chance to do something that’s important to you, not what your family thinks is important to you, or teachers think are important to you. Do what is important to you, because only you know what’s important to you. You’ve got to stick to your own dreams, follow your own heart, start speaking from your gut. Freedom is speaking up for your rights and knowing what you are going to do and say.”*

*“Let people with disabilities speak for themselves and not let others speak for them. Then they have a chance of their own voice being heard instead of others.”*

*“Let your kids go, but think about their future, too. You know what your kids’ future is going to be like, when you see what they can do. You’ve got to let kids show you what they can do, or they are not going to get the future that they want, not what the parents can see, but what the kids themselves can see.”*

What opportunities have helped me learn about what I (or my son or daughter) want to do with my life?

How did these opportunities shape my ideas about the future?

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