



Justin was a young adult, excited to launch a life of independence after moving to Fresno, California.

He got an apartment, found a job, and played basketball in his free time. All seemed to be going well. His family kept in regular touch from Las Vegas.

But in February 2011, nobody had heard from Justin in awhile. One day his mom reached him by phone.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“It’s Mom,” she responded.

Who?”

She got off the phone and said, “Something’s wrong with Justin.” In a panic, Damon got in the car and drove.

When Damon arrived, he found his son was confused and emaciated. Justin had blisters down his throat. There was mold on the food in his fridge.

What followed was months in acute care, extensive hospital testing, and no definitive answers. Justin’s brain was swollen, resulting in severe brain impairment. It would be months before a physician diagnosed Behcets, a rare autoimmune disorder.

Finally he discharged from the hospital to be cared for at home. It was a ‘round- the-clock job. The damage to his brain

caused him to sit and stare into space. Or hallucinate. If left alone, he might open the door and walk out into traffic. The stress of providing a safe place for Justin was having a huge impact on the family, said Damon. “We took turns sleeping at the couch. Jesse’s mom was experiencing pre-strokes. I was always on the phone, worried that I was going to lose my job. We were running out of ideas for how to care for him.”

When they got connected with Nevada Community Enrichment Program (NCEP), the only nonprofit, post acute brain injury rehabilitation program in Nevada, they were elated. “Early on,” Damon says of the rehab Justin received there, “he was not very responsive. He was making baby steps. But they never gave up. They kept working and working with him.”

As Justin progressed, the family heard about Accessible Space’s group home for individuals with traumatic brain injuries. Casa Norte offered the safety of 24-hour supervised care, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

The timing seemed miraculous. A vacancy opened up and Justin moved into his new home.

Today he is making encouraging progress. Medication has been found that helped reduce the swelling in his brain and allowed his body to continue healing. Through NCEP and Casa Norte, he is working on physical, cognitive, and social skills. Damon knows that his son has a long way to go, but he is hopeful.

“NCEP, ASI, and Casa Norte have been such an integral part of my son’s life since he’s gotten sick, it cannot be overstated. We’re so far ahead of our expectations.”

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