

Jamil Williams learns more about his disability while contributing to spinal cord injury research
Life at Kessler Foundation - Ep 4

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JOAN BANKS-SMITH: 00:08 Every study that I'm involved in, it feels like I'm studying myself all over again. Sometimes it doesn't feel like work because me dealing in living with my spinal cord injury, I also look at that as an opportunity to learn more about my diagnosis. So it works out both ways for me. It's a win-win.

JAMIL WILLIAMS: 00:30 That was Jamil Williams, a research assistant from our Center for Spinal Cord Injury Research. And this is another episode of Life at Kessler Foundation. I'm your host, Joan Banks-Smith, creative producer here at the foundation and editor and producer of this podcast. Welcome to the show, Jamil.

BANKS-SMITH: 00:48 Thank you. Thank you for having me.

WILLIAMS: 00:50 Jamil, what brought you to the foundation?

BANKS-SMITH: 00:52 I enrolled in a few studies. One, particularly, is the-- I believe it's called the model system. It involves them reaching out to you every five years just to see how things are going, how you're progressing. I would do a bunch of different other studies, and I just took a liking to how they work alongside or work with patients after their discharge and just throughout their whole journey

WILLIAMS: 01:20 For clarification, does that mean that you had a spinal cord injury?

BANKS-SMITH: 01:23 Oh, yes, yes. So as I was coming back for outpatient therapy, that's how I came across the foundation, who asked me if I was willing to participate in several different studies. And I took them up on their offer, and I've been doing studies ever since 2002.

WILLIAMS: 01:43 That's what led you to become interested in working for the foundation?

BANKS-SMITH: 01:47 Yes. Yes. So another week will make a year for me here at the foundation, and it's been a blessing.

WILLIAMS: 01:54 Well, that's good to hear. You have a firsthand account of being a participant and also being able to translate that over to doing research at the foundation.

BANKS-SMITH: 02:04 Yes, absolutely. I've experienced it from both sides of the track. It's a great thing, and the work that we do here is awesome. It was really at the forefront of a lot of things that will help you with your progress involving spinal cord injuries and other injuries, of course. But what I do here is pertaining to spinal cord injuries.

WILLIAMS: 02:30 What is your role here at the foundation?

BANKS-SMITH: 02:33 I am a spinal cord injury research assistant. And what that entails is, I consent people for different studies. I do a lot of questionnaires, interviews over the phone, depending on what the study consists of. We do a lot of what we call sensory testing,

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and it looks to see how that person feels different temperatures, cool or warm, different sensations, pretty much. Every study that I'm involved in, it feels like I'm studying myself all over again. Sometimes it doesn't feel like work because me dealing and living with my spinal cord injury-- when we come across these different studies that we reach out to participants and try to consent them in, I also look at that as an opportunity to learn more about my diagnosis. So it works out both ways for me. It's a win-win.

WILLIAMS: 03:31 You and I talked earlier about some of the studies you're involved in as a research assistant.

BANKS-SMITH: 03:36 Yes.

WILLIAMS: 03:37 One that you're currently enrolling for is the brain and pain. Can you talk to us a little more about what that study involves?

BANKS-SMITH: 03:45 This is a great study because what we do is we're comparing brain wave activities with individuals who live with spinal cord injuries compared to able-bodied individuals. So what we do is when that person is experiencing pain, we want to check their brain waves to see what's the differences between one with the spinal cord injury and one that's able-bodied. So we can take this information and down the line, we can help reduce-- or just help with the pain levels in people with spinal cord injuries. So I think it's a beautiful thing.

WILLIAMS: 04:29 Thank you so much for being with us today and for bringing us on your own personal journey.

BANKS-SMITH: 04:34 Thank you, and I appreciate the opportunity you've given for me to come on here and speak and give a testimony of what I'm going through. Thank you so much.

WILLIAMS: 04:46 Tuned into our podcast series lately? Join our listeners in 90 countries who enjoy learning about the work of Kessler Foundation. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Listen to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, SoundCloud, or wherever you get your podcasts. This podcast was recorded on Tuesday, August 17, 2021, remotely, and was edited and produced by Joan Banks-Smith, creative producer for Kessler Foundation. For more information about Jamil, the Center for Spinal Cord Injury Research, or interested in a career at Kessler Foundation, be sure and check out the program notes.

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