

Uniting Gothenburg High in a different way

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Friday, 01 November 2013 14:07 - Last Updated Friday, 01 November 2013 14:22



Surrounded by friends

Jarred McMichael is a 17-year-old junior at Gothenburg High School with many friends.

He enjoys playing sports with his family and is no slouch in physical education doing everything all the other students do.

The only difference is Jarred has Down's Syndrome.

"He can do anything. He just does it differently," said his mother Sherri McMichael. "Whatever he decides he wants to do, he does."

Sherri said the kids in school rally around her son and they help him be successful.

"In P.E., the kids let him serve the entire time in volleyball which is something they didn't have to do," Sherri said. "They want to include him."

School isn't the only place Jarred is surrounded by friends. He plays on a Cozad basketball team and swims in state and regional Special Olympic competitions.

Sherri said he has always wanted to play sports like his older siblings and those activities allow him to do so.

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“I know if he played sports for the high school teams, he would be the first one on the field or court,” Sherri said.

She has since tried to start a Gothenburg Special Olympics team to fill Jarred and the family’s time with sports.

“Sports are everything in our family,” Sherri said. “His older siblings played sports, his younger brother plays sports.”

In school, Jarred is assisted by paraeducator Katherine Middleton.

While Jarred doesn’t usually attend regular classes, he does spend time with Middleton for most of the day.

On some days, the two drop by classes for a learning exercise before going to the local senior center.

“We will do laundry and clean tables there,” Middleton said. “He is learning many life skills.”

Being at school and around his friends are things that Jarred enjoys, Sherri said.

But life isn’t always enjoyable for Jarred when things in his life change or if he wants something but can’t describe it.

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social media and a group of young women who are part of the school's social media team. They are all wearing blue t-shirts with a yellow logo on the front. They are arranged in several rows, with some standing and some sitting or kneeling in the front. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.