

MOBILITY MEANS INDEPENDENCE FOR JERAMIAH GOUIN

Rodeo was in **Jeremiah Gouin**'s blood. Generations of his family participated in it, and so did he from a young age until a catastrophic injury during a bull riding event as a junior in high school. His future changed in an instant. But thanks to support from his family, his community, and the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NMDVR), the Sapello, NM resident now has plenty to look forward to.

The 2016 accident resulted in an ASIA A C5-C6 spinal cord injury. Not only was Gouin unable to walk, he had lost all motor movement in hands and fingers. He spent four months at Craig Hospital in Colorado—renowned for its specialization in spinal cord injury rehab—where he had to relearn basic skills, including how to eat.



When he returned home, he found that family, neighbors, friends, and lots of people he didn't know had come together to provide support. "The roping family and rodeo family put on a benefit to help pay for medical bills," Gouin recalls. "There was a lot of organization from the community to raise money. It was a blessing that the community came together as one to do something like that."

Casilda Gallegos, NMDVR Program Manager for the Las Vegas area, has two sons who went to school with Gouin. She reached out to provide assistance from the agency, including career counseling and paying for expenses like a temporary personal assistant, modifying his vehicle with hand controls so he could drive on his own, and college tuition not covered by other financial aid.

At first, his family needed convincing that NMDVR could help in his situation. He's glad they took Gallegos up on the offer. "For sure, I'd recommend it for anybody in any kind of need that DVR can help with," says Gouin.

He graduated from Robertson High School and then from Luna Community College with a degree in Computer Science/Information Technology (IT). Gouin is now back at Robertson as a staff member, working as an IT Help Desk Technician and basketball coach at Memorial Middle School. The 23-year-old is also staying involved in rodeo as a judge and chair of a youth rodeo series at the Mora/San Miguel Fairgrounds. He has an Action Trackchair[®] that allows him to get around in the mud and dirt of rodeo arenas.



Through continuing physical rehabilitation and hard work, Gouin has gained motor movement in his arms and upper body and has strengthened his core to the point where he can hold himself up.

“I do see myself riding again. It’s just a matter of patience,” the ever-optimistic Gouin says.

“I’ve gotten a lot more mobility than other people expected. **The small things you do every day build up over time. It’s just a matter of doing it.**”

In the meantime, Gouin looks forward to “doing as much as I can to advise and inspire people in my situation and to continue living life to the fullest as much as possible.”

###