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CPD LEGACY STORY: CHARLOTTE SPENCER

February 9, 2011 by cephrson

This CPD Legacy Story is written by Charlotte Spencer, the mother of one of the students at the CPD's Postsecondary Education, Employment, and Research (PEER) program.

Charlotte, herself, is attending the Interdisciplinary Disability Awareness Learning and Service (IDASL) class offered by the CPD, as a family member of a person with disabilities. She also is a family representative on the CPD Consumer Advisory Council.

From a proud mom's perspective

By Charlotte Spencer

This is Alessandra. She is 20 1/2 years old and the oldest of 3 daughters. Alessandra is autistic and currently attends the PEER classroom at the CPD. She is in her last year there. She has had so many wonderful experiences through the PEER Program. She has worked at various places on campus, and gets to feel first-hand the student atmosphere. As she walks to her job-site, she can be a part of the hustle and bustle of campus life. An experience her mother never dreamed possible for her. And now, sadly, it is coming to an end. But in reality, this will be a new beginning for the next step in Alessandra's life. That even though she will always live with me as a dependent, she can still live with independence and utilize her life skills she has learned in the PEER Program. As her mom, I couldn't have imagined a better Post-High experience for my very special daughter, Alessandra.

When you're a parent of a child, or in my case a young adult, with special needs sometimes your "fur" gets a little ruffled. You may politely bite your lip as the professional sitting across from you in your child's I.E.P states that your child just doesn't 'quite' meet the criteria to receive 'X' services (fill in the blank). Or early in your child's diagnosis, your child's teacher suggests to you that Ritalin "might help". Yes, as a parent of a child with a disability, I have been known to bristle up a bit, and to come across as someone with a wall up. A long time ago in a state far, far away, I had to employ the services of an attorney at one point for my daughter to receive services. Said attorney gave me some great advice, 'you are your child's best advocate'. (I want to comically add to that comment, 'and if you don’t like what I have to say, I've got legal council and I'm not afraid to use it!')

On the matter of being an advocate, I have had the opportunity to participate as a parent advocate and bea part of the IDASL this year. I like to joke- I must not have gotten it right the first time - (gosh it's like having to hire that attorney all over again...I'm kidding). Through this wonderful class, I can share my experiences, as well as my daughter's, and also learn from the students attending from their various disciplines. As we hear advocates in the community and various organizations speak of the hurdles they are up against, or the barriers in the
way of individuals with disabilities, we can begin to better understand how we can change our perspective or thinking about the matter of disabilities and advocacy.

I've learned we are all on the same side of the wall. That it isn't just MY wall, and MY frustration. It really is our battle together. And if we, as one collective whole, cannot meet and agree to the specifics and logistics of a child's needs, than truly we, as a collective whole, have failed that child indeed.

Hillary Clinton was right (at least on this point) when she said, "It takes a village to raise a child."