CPD Legacy Story: Laura Oppermann

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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This CPD Legacy Story is written by Laura Oppermann and is about the support she has received from CPD programs through the years for her son, Christoph. Laura is the parent partner at Budge Clinic Pediatrics Medical Home, coordinates Medical Home Care with Intermountain Healthcare, and is currently a service coordinator for the CPD’s Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Diagnostic Clinic.

Moving to a new place with a young child with severe disabilities and on-going medical needs can be daunting.

We decided to move from Germany to Logan when our son, Christoph, was two and a half. His health was very fragile. Surgeries, evaluations, treatments, as well as emergency ambulance rides were part of our routine. Our beautiful boy had significant needs and we needed to connect with physicians and early interventionists immediately upon arrival. We would have a 6-month waiting period for insurance, and I didn’t know how a major pre-existing condition might impact our coverage or ability to qualify. Needless to say, we were nervous.

A family member suggested I call the Center for Persons with Disabilities. I remember connecting with an informed, compassionate woman in the Up to 3 Program on the phone. I was so relieved to find someone who understood and could answer my questions! She let me know that following an evaluation, my son could receive home therapy services through their program. She listened to my concerns about getting insurance and directed me to Health and Human Services to ask about an insurance program I had never heard of before, called Medicaid.

Soon after we arrived in Logan, I met our service coordinator, Carol (Winn), who then introduced me to PT, OT and speech therapists. They came to our home to observe, listen and teach me as we worked to come up with strategies to help my son progress. They connected us with The Utah School for the Deaf and Blind and we began to receive vision services, and eventually (deafblind) intervenor services as well.

Everyone was patient with us during multiple hospitalizations and made sure services were as continuous as possible. Preschool came up right away, and Chris came to the CPD to attend the transition classroom for a couple of months. This was extremely helpful, as, in my eyes, he was too young, small, and fragile to leave home and I was terrified to put him on a bus for an hour ride to Smithfield to go to school for the morning. His experience in the transition classroom helped ease me into this big step and understand how much he would benefit from school.

In addition to Up to 3, Chris also received great services through the feeding clinic (at the CPD); we borrowed books about disabilities from the lending library; and received consultation and help from the Assistive Technology Lab.

Throughout all our experiences, staff listened carefully to what we had to say. They encouraged us in our efforts and, most importantly, showed great respect and compassion to all members of our family—especially Christoph. They were considerate of our time and priorities and created an environment of fun, not guilt or obligation. We were able to borrow equipment, try it out, and then develop devices specific for my son’s needs.

Through connections made at the CPD, I became involved in a local parent support group called the Parent Connection which pushed Logan Regional Hospital to create the pediatric rehabilitation unit, Cache Kids, so families of children over 3 didn’t have to leave the valley for therapy. I also sat on the CPD’s Consumer Advisory Board for a while and got involved with Utah’s Family to Family support network. This led to other connections with Family Voices, Sparkle, IDASL, One Application, UREND and Medical Home.

I have been involved with Medical Home for the past eight years, working with families and their pediatricians to make sure families receive compassionate, coordinated care and access to the supports they need to successfully care for their children with disabilities.

Now I’m working as service coordinator in the ASD Diagnostic Clinic and plan to continue my association with the CPD and its staff indefinitely. I appreciate how my experiences with my son and the wonderful people who surrounded him and accepted him have shaped the person I have become.
Christoph passed away September 18, 2008.