

Chair Beyer, Chair Nosse, and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Stephanie Widler and I live in Redmond, Oregon. I have two sons, Warren who is 13 and Sam who is 6. Warren loves videogames and does Crossfit. He also has Down syndrome.

Before we moved to Oregon we lived in a small town that had nothing in place like the Family Networks. When my son was a couple months old we were connected with Early Intervention Services. These services were vital to our family, but something was missing. I remember thinking that I had so much to worry about. The only idea I had of what the future might hold came from outdated books and articles – and that future was bleak. I wanted to meet other parents who understood where we were in life. I wanted to talk to a mom with a preschooler or a kindergartener. The early intervention staff were trying their hardest to help us find connection, but their abilities were limited by their caseloads and privacy laws.

When we moved to Redmond, I needed to figure out which doctors we should use, which schools we should look at, and what else I could be doing for Warren. I needed other parents who had been there. I wanted to meet older kids like my son. I knew my son's progress in life would look different and I just couldn't visualize anything beyond our immediate picture. I needed a vision for what life could look like – That's what the Family Network gave me.

Through my family's involvement with the Network I can see possibilities for my son's future that is nothing like I imagined all those years ago. I can see my son growing up, getting a job, moving out on his own. Through the Family Network, I have been given the tools I need to help my son learn to advocate for himself and be an active participant in his community. And through that same Family Network, I have seen our community change. By partnering with our local Family Network, organizations in our community, like the High Desert Museum, have become more accessible and welcoming. It's now one of my son's favorite places to go. Families need vision for the future if we are going to help our children pursue that future. Communities need help sometimes to know how to welcome all families. We need Family Networks.

Please continue to fund Family Networks so families like mine can continue to build a brighter future for their kids – my kids.

Thank you,

Stephanie Widler
Redmond, OR