

We are writing to tell you a bit about the critical impact the Regional Family Network program from DHS' Developmental Disability Services has had for our children and our family, and ask you to ensure that funding for it is not cut as the legislature wrestles with the budget impacts of the recession.

We have 3 children. The older two have diagnoses of high-functioning ASD and ADHD, but we did not understand what they were struggling with until they entered the public school system. We did not understand why we started getting phone calls every day about problem behaviors from our very bright children. Why our kids, who seemed like they should be excelling at school, were being sent home instead.

It began with our oldest in Kindergarten. He wasn't able to complete even a half-day program without issues. It came out at home too, in disruptive and dangerous behavior. His behavior at school led to meetings. We found a psychiatrist and a therapist. We juggled our careers around meetings, appointments, evaluations, and persistent, unscheduled crisis phone calls from school. At the start of first grade, we tried ADHD medication. Yet the problems continued.

While we were starting to feel like we understood our son better, he was failing out of the system. He was just barely too high-functioning to qualify for DD services. Too articulate to be recognized as having ASD by standard school evaluations at the time, despite a clear medical diagnosis. We and the rest of his IEP team at school could not see eye to eye on how to proceed. Home life was a minefield. We were falling behind in our jobs, and the ordeal was taking away time we should have been giving to his younger siblings. Then his sister started school, and we started hearing negative reports about her behavior as well.

We did not see a way forward until someone connected us to Cheryl Cisneros at Creating Opportunities, the Regional Family Network provider for Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties. She showed us that we were far from the only family to struggle as we did. She provided resources, advocacy, and a calm, positive perspective to help us navigate the fractious IEP process in our home district. When we still were not having success there, she helped us with the transition to another district. When our daughter was failing to remain in the classroom for more than five minutes a day, and struggling with dangerous levels of low self-esteem from her lack of success, she helped us advocate for and secure IEP services.

I wish I could say that with the resources and assistance from Creating Opportunities that all of our children's struggles have been solved, but that is not how mental health works. Our son will be entering 8th grade this fall. We have had to switch school districts twice to find the resources and in-school supports that he needs, and still there have been major issues. Finding the right mix of supports to unlock our daughter's potential still involves a lot of phone calls home. Home life is still frequently rocky. And yet, every time we need help, Cheryl has been there. With advice. With support. Juggling her schedule to be present at school meetings, and taking calls and appointments after hours to guarantee we connect.

What *\*has\** changed, is that we now see a future for our kids. With new evaluation methods, the school system now formally recognizes their ASD diagnoses. The advocacy Creating Opportunities has provided for our children, and taught us to do ourselves, has helped them stay in the system long enough to see this happen, and has completely changed the trajectory of our family. We are no longer stumbling from crisis to crisis, and know that the next time we encounter a challenge, Creating Opportunities will be there to see us through.

The resources, advocacy and training that the Regional Family Network provides to families are exactly the sort of early interventions that have outsized impacts later in a child's life. In a family's future. Funding RFN is an investment that saves the state money. It saves futures. It saves lives.

Creating Opportunities has been an advocate for us at some of the most difficult times in our lives. We now ask you to join us in advocating for them, so that they can continue to be a positive force for families who would otherwise slip through the cracks.

Howard Family from Monmouth OR



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