

Dear Mr. Legislator,

My name is Benjamin. I am 8 years old. When I was younger, my mom thought that because I experience cerebral palsy and autism, I might not have a full life like other typical kids around me. She thought because I have so many obstacles working against me, I might not have many friends or the ability to really be part of a community.

Two years ago, she was invited to a Family Network event in Portland. She heard things she had never really thought about before: the concept that disability is natural, presuming competence in one's child, and how every person has a right to a whole, empowered life in their community.

After that event, my mom and dad changed! And my life really changed! My mom continued learning more about what natural supports and community-building looked like from her family network. This last summer, she actively laid out a plan to put those in place. She picked 3 different community settings for me to frequently visit: our local grocery store, the library, and the vacation Bible schools which the community churches offer.

Boy, did we have fun!

Now everybody knows my name at the grocery store, even the customers! The employees help me pick out my banana, and the cashier even helps me use my card to pay for it. Maybe in a few years, my mom won't even have to go in the store with me!

At the library, I get the opportunity to walk around and say hi to the other kids also picking out their books. The same employees always work there and they help me, even though I can almost check out my library books by myself!



I loved vacation Bible school! Mom and I met lots of new friends. My peers started learning how I communicate, that I give great hi-fives, and that I think it's hilarious when they run around in circles! My new friends helped me play the games every day!

Now we can't go anywhere without running into someone we know. My mom says next summer she's going to "up her game." I'm not sure what that means, but I can hardly wait!

Mr. Legislator, my life changed because of FACT, our local family network. Would you please make sure it sticks around? Because just like my mom, some of my friends' moms and dads still really need to hear that EVERY person can live a full, empowered life and be an active part of their community!

Your friend,

Benjamin

