



Building Resources for Individuals with Disabilities to Gain Equality

BEN YOUNG'S SPEECH

September 27, 2018

Good afternoon. My name is Ben and I have Cerebral Palsy. Imagine with me that you are a person with a developmental disability who is also in a wheelchair, just like me. Imagine what it is like to have a stranger come into your home. That stranger will have to help feed you, clothe you, and clean you. You don't know if that same person is going to be there the next day. Or the next. Or if they will be gone and a new stranger will be coming. This has been my life as an adult. It has happened so many times, that I don't even think about it anymore. I have had to just get used to these facts of my life now. When I was asked what it is like to live like that, my honest answer was that I really don't know any other way.

Because of the staffing shortage, not only do I deal with the revolving door of strangers, but I also can't go to the functions in my community as much as I would like to. I am very involved in my church. In fact, I am on the Special Needs Ministry and help the church run smoothly and more adaptable to people with disabilities of all kinds. I want to attend meetings, and be a part of the decision making, and sometimes I can't go and participate like I want to, because someone called off or quit again and I don't have the transportation or coverage to attend the things I want to.

It also gets lonely sometimes. There have only been a couple of times that my staff have stuck around long enough to create a real lasting friendship with them. I have become used to the fact that they won't be more than an acquaintance or a paid staff there to do a job for a short time. I would love to have more friendships and longer lasting relationships with the people that take care of me.

A lot of times, the community, the government and others look at people with developmental disabilities as one big unit. But each and every one of us is an individual. My needs, dreams and aspirations are different than the next person. In my lifetime I have seen four bed homes close down, and those people have been moved to eight bed homes, even if the people don't get along or blend very well. It was difficult for me to voice my opinion in a way that would allow me to live on my own or where I want to live. I am still fighting that fight.

We are here today to have a louder conversation. Help me to help myself by creating a unified voice that cannot be ignored. I don't want to just get used to the way things are, but I want to thrive and choose my own path for my life. Will you join me? Thank you for your time.