



Circle of Friends and Beyond

Transcript

Josie (parent of Jonathan): It was the first time I heard of Circle of Friends, and the way it was explained to me was that we all have a circle of friends, where our family is the inner circle and then our good friends and outside of that acquaintances and then outside of that our doctors and dentists and professionals. But people with intellectual disabilities, usually, they have their families and then they skip 2 or 3 circles away out to professionals.

And I thought, “Oh yes, I see that happening already with Jonathan.” So I really wanted to do something to avoid that in Jonathan’s life, and something that would foster his ability to make friends and to keep friends in the long term. And that’s where the idea of hiring people...And it did pay off, because now he does have a lot of friends--and I don’t have to pay anybody anymore! (*Laughter*)

Lauchie (one of Jonathan’s Junior High teachers): One of the things I was thinking about coming up here (to this meeting) was that it has to be “real.” And so in the beginning maybe it was artificial, but the relationships that you allowed him to have were real relationships. And I think sometimes we over-rely on the programming piece, the Circle of Friends piece, and what it does is it creates supports and helps—especially in the teenage/adolescent period it does help. But if it stops there, then it really stops.

And I think you recognized—and I think when we have our children, you know, parents will say, I always want my little child to stay a child, to be a child forever, and when you have a child with developmental disabilities the potential is there for that to happen! And you and your husband and your children allowed Jonathan to grow. Even though he might not have always been ready to take that move, but you’re always thinking about that next step forward. And I think with a lot of parents, it becomes, “Well, that might be dangerous to stay in a hotel room with a bunch of boys all by yourself.” Or “It might be dangerous to go sledding in the toboggan.” Or in some cases--one of the students I had, we used to roll him down the Mabou hill in his wheelchair—whoosh! And then I’d run after him. It might be dangerous. But we all do things that are dangerous, right. So, it’s in

those moments that things become real. And so I think that is a characteristic that I would say it's hard to duplicate, because a lot of it belongs to parents.

(With thanks to Josie MacEachern and Lauchie Mackinnon – and to L'Arche Cape Breton for videotaping this conversation.)



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