

December 8, 2017

Re: 30th Anniversary of the Educational Assistants Association – Appreciation Day

From: Anne Brickenden and Ed Hager – Parents of Art

Dear Lisa and Colleagues:

Anne and I first became aware of your profession during our first IPRC meeting October 1996. Our son, Art, was placed in a regular early-years' classroom in our local rural school, with the description of a "physically able-bodied, high energy boy who challenges authority and has cognitive/receptive language skills greater than expressive language skills". His assigned Educational Assistant (EA), was in fact the principal's spouse. Soon a younger EA was required as he was a "runner".

During the first four years, our EAs were able to champion Art's strength: his reading skills which were at grade level. However by year five, we decided to enroll Art in a Developmental Classroom setting, busing him to a new school with new Educational Assistants. We were preparing him for the rural High School. The DC class was a perfect fit as Art was supported by four EAs covering the multitude of life and learning skills. The subsequent transition to High School was unremarkable due to the work of his EAs.

Here in High School, EAs introduced special education technologies in the form of computer software. His reading skills continued to improve while expressive dialogue remained a work in progress. These were the best school years of his life. The developmental classroom allowed him to learn and grow at his own pace. Supports by the EAs were always part of the day. His integration with peers was the best. Art rocked to music, went to dances and thereby increasing social awareness to students with disabilities. All said and done, students elected Art as Prom King during his final year.

Transition to community was also facilitated by his EAs. Art's first CO-OP placement was job coached by his EA, who also was his transportation as our rural schools did not have bus nor taxi services. Further transitioning to the local Community Living Association was assisted by the high school EAs.

Today, Art holds a permanent part-time job, several seasonal jobs and continues to volunteer weekly at his local elementary schools assisting EAs during lunch and breakfast programs.

To state that Art's life was impacted by his relationships throughout school with his EAs and supporting staff would be an understatement. He remembers each one by name. He was invited to one's retirement party and recently they get together at the movie theater.

Share this story amongst your colleagues. The lives you all touch in your local school actually continues in a most positive and successful way that may not be readily known or seen.

Congratulations to your association and thank you from all us parents.

Anne, Ed and Art.