

Testimony SB2269

Life was tough growing up for me being on the spectrum, there are times I don't understand anything at all, and there are times I understood, I have to be reminded every time (but not all the time) when things need to be done. Sometimes I have to remove myself from a situation because of something I did wrong or when things get too busy. When I finished elementary school, my family moved from Oklahoma City to North Dakota to be closer to family, and I had to cope with my new life in a new town. Once middle school started, I began to struggle with schoolwork and began to fall behind because of my executive functioning. My lack of organizational skills, teachers didn't understand how I learned. That's when I had an aide in the classroom. Then it was time for me to go to high school. I realized that I had to keep my head in the game if I wanted to graduate with my friends. I didn't do so well during my freshman year. Due to my anxiety about social situations, I didn't go to dances and other school activities. I didn't have a lot of friends. Schoolwork was hard, and it wasn't easy for me to turn in assignments on time. Classroom noise is difficult for me, and I have a hard time concentrating when others are talking around me, I was also anxious over fire drills and lockdown drills as it involved loud noises and flashing lights. I wore earmuffs during fire drills, and other school functions like pep rallies and assemblies because of the loud noise. As my sophomore year started, I was introduced to the Peer to Peer program at Century High; it helped me get over my social anxiety. I was able to attend school

functions with friends. Because of the services and Peer to Peer, I was able to graduate with my friends.

When I went off to MCAD in 2018, I didn't fully understand how to access services to support my needs academically. My anxiety got the better of me, and I had to drop out during the second semester of 2019. I remember the day when I sat in on one of the Autism Task Force meetings and I heard about the Advancing Students Toward Education and Employment Program (ASTEP) at Minot State, a peer mentoring program through the Dakota College at Bottineau. Their purpose is to help kids with I/DD receive the support they need to be successful in college and in receiving meaningful employment through Peer Mentors, I remember hearing about ASTEP from an old high school friend, who was in the program when I was at MCAD. Last year I decided to apply for the program and I was accepted to the program. Being in ASTEP was a lot better for me than the services they had at MCAD where the only thing they can do is have a notetaker, I asked for peer mentors but I did not get them there.

With ASTEP, I was able to get support such as Notetakers, Peer Mentors, Help with Homework, independent living skills, and Job shadowing. Homework wasn't hard for me anymore, as I worked with a mentor to work on the assignments that were given to me by my professors and turning them in on time, and the mentors are in the classroom with me. I also improved my independent living skills through a program outside of ASTEP, where during that time, I clean my dorm and do laundry. I also learned my graphic design through an internship with the Minot Athletics department where I work

on promoting the Athletics program through making and learning the in and outs of photoshop design and teaching my coach illustrator through my work.

Currently, I work two jobs on campus, one working with athletics and the other broadcasting as I have been recently hired as a cameraman for BEK Sports, a branch of BEK Telecom and BEK TV. I continue with ABA through Poppie's Promise and Mental Health services with Pediatric Therapy Partners, and I look forward to finishing my first year of college at Minot State.

Thank you for your time.

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