

Our son is a student currently enrolled in the ASTEP program, run by Dakota College Bottineau on Minot State's campus. He is thriving in his student life and we are very grateful that such a program exists for young adults like our son.

School was difficult for our son from day one, even as far back as preschool. He has had developmental delays (both physical and mental) since birth and in elementary school he was diagnosed with ADHD and a severe math learning disability and put on an Individualized Education Plan. Whilst he was in high school, he was assessed to be a Level 2 client by the North Dakota State Vocational Rehabilitation program, qualifying him for Job Services and other state assistance.

Despite his challenges, our son has never disallowed himself the notion that he could have the same goals as his classmates, dream the same dreams as his friends and look to the future like his siblings. He wants to contribute to society and to live and work amongst his peers, even if in a slightly lesser capacity.

As he neared his high school graduation, we had many sleepless nights worrying about what his next steps would - and COULD - be. A friend told us about ASTEP and it was as if the pieces fell into place for our family. He applied, interviewed, was accepted ... and immediately enrolled.

During his first semester in the ASTEP program, our son made gains we weren't sure possible. He enrolled and excelled in classes such as First Year Experience, Life Skills and Concepts of Wellness and Fitness. This spring, he is going to a seminar called SAFE Training where he will learn valuable lessons and insights about adult relationships, Communication, Decision Making and Social Media. ASTEP is in routine contact with us to ensure that our son's needs are being addressed, that he's staying safe and that he's staying engaged.

Our son is living independently, on campus and in a dorm with other young people from all over the United States and the world. His eyes are opened every day to different ideas, thoughts and life experiences. This program is exposing him to a plethora of life choices while encouraging him to make healthy and attainable steps toward independence. Our happy young man is thriving at ASTEP and we know this enriching experience will carry him through the rest of his life.

Please support this legislation.