

Fargo In forum

Letter to the Editor

**101 5th Street North
Fargo, ND 58102**

I am 17 years old and am diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. I had some problems and needed a specialist to help me with my challenges. My mom is disabled and didn't have the money to get the help I needed so she asked Cass County Children's services to help her help me. They took over as my guardian and then they treated me like a common criminal.

They put me in a foster home where I was abused. My mom had to get the sheriff to get me and take me to the hospital because I got hurt and my foster parents wouldn't take me to the doctor. They keep me drugged on medications and I don't even have a doctor experienced in Asperger's to work with me. They just use a general practitioner to keep me overly medicated and sick.

They spent a year ignoring me and not helping me. My mom told them to let me come home with her so she could move to a state that could provide services for me, but Children's services refused. They haven't helped me get through school, they haven't helped me with counseling, and they won't even take me to the doctors when I am sick. If I were to ask for a Christmas present, it would be that my mom and I could be reunited, but neither my mom nor I can find a lawyer who will help us.

If Cass County gets their way, I will be forced to live in a group home, and North Dakota tax payers will be paying for me to be there. My mom is willing to help me, Why can't Children's Services?

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This is a copy of my letter to the editor when I lived in a foster home in Mandan. I was so angry and I couldn't control my rage. I'm still not sure what it is that makes me explode, but I have some ideas. I wish I had a counselor to talk to last year when I was at my worst. Part of my problem is my Asperger's, part is a vague memory of abuse from my stepdad, and a lot is from asking for help and instead of being helped, I was punished for having a developmental delay.

People like me feel at a more intense level. My anger can be compared to the spiciness of salsa. Calm people have a mild anger level, like mild salsa. Most people are like medium salsa, where they have a slow intense burn that quickly dissipates. I am like a hot salsa where I can burn so high, I blister and scorch whatever I touch.

The reason is not because of my immaturity or lack of control, but because my brain processes stimuli differently. When I was an infant, I had some things happen to stunt the growth of my brain. Not all my brain was affected by the incident, rather, just the communication part of my brain that sends messages from my eyes, ears and touch to my brain for processing and reasoning. Because parts of my brain that don't normally do this job took over to compensate for the damaged brain cells, I have to adapt the way I understand things. This is very frustrating. First I have to realize I am not seeing, hearing or feeling what is actually happening, I then have to adapt myself to understand that what I understood, might not be what was actually happening. I have to adapt my knowledge to compensate for what my instincts are telling me to believe. I must mentally tell my body to act in a way that doesn't feel right. I may talk to myself to make sure I am reacting appropriately for a given situation. This is all in an effort to fit in with, and be accepted by my peers, teachers, neighbors and other members of the community.

When I was 16, I was so overwhelmed by trying to fit in and do the right thing when I was out in public that I would burn out and explode when I came home. My home with my family was the only sanctuary where I could feel safe enough to let my real feelings and frustration out. I wasn't aware that I was on the edge of a breakdown or how bad I was frightening my family. I knew I wanted help, but didn't know how to ask for it. When my mom begged me to express myself in a safer calmer way, I blew up at her. I would escalate and put her out of control where she would yell at me. This would help me to justify my meltdowns. She finally asked for help from Children's services. The police would come to the house and yell at me like I was their kid. That would make me angry, I tried to say that I needed someone to talk to, but the police heard that I wanted to make trouble for my mom. I was made to feel that I was breaking the law when I got angry. I went to Prairie St. John as an in-patient and was told that I was acting like a juvenile delinquent. I did have some positive communication with Dr. Hanson from Prairie, but when Children's services took over, I didn't get to talk to him anymore. I would get medicine from doctors that I never had appointments with and when I started taking notes to document what was going on, Children's services had my journal taken from me. I felt like my brain was in a vacuum. I couldn't focus - my back and kidneys hurt constantly and when I asked for help, I got told to quit whining. I went to a foster home where the foster parents yelled and told me to do things that I knew were wrong. They told me about the girl who was in foster care with them before I moved in with them. She was 17, from Fargo, I won't tell you her name, but I can tell

you about things she was expected to do and personal things that the foster parents regaled to me. When she turned 18, she left the foster family and that was how I got there. They told me that my mom was a trouble maker and they were going to put her in her place. They yelled at me and the other foster child that was living there. Once the other boy wrecked on his bike and hurt himself, and the foster family refused to get him checked out. He had a large bump on his head and was bleeding and they just put a bandied on his head and told him to go back out and play. I couldn't handle the yelling and stress and I started to pace the floor. The foster dad went to work and as soon as he left, the foster mom left me and went to her mom's because she said she was afraid of me. I called my mom, even though I was told I didn't have permission to, and my mom called the sheriff to check on me. I had bumped my head and the sheriff asked if I wanted to go to the hospital. I said yes and then the foster dad said that I was doing this for attention and told me that he was going to get me placed in a mental institution because I was crazy. I got placed in a safe home and was not allowed to call to my mom. Then I was placed in another foster home in Mandan. Those foster parents were kind, but they were older and the wife worked. The husband was disabled and suffered from depression. I would come home from school to a darkened house; the dad was sitting on the couch watching South Park or other such shows. I would have to wait for the mom to come home to get a dinner, or make something myself. I would cook dinner for the dad, another foster son and myself. When the mom came home, she could relax and eat a plate also. It was like living with disabled grandparents. They couldn't help me in school, they promised to look for a tutor to help me, but never got around to it and as a result, I failed most of my junior year. I tried talking to my children's services case manager and was told if I could show that I could go a length of time without losing my temper, I could move back home with my mom. When I said I needed a counselor to help me see why I was angry so that I could have some closure and get on with my life, I was told to "Be a good little boy and behave myself". The case manager had no intention of ever letting me reunite with my mom. I was supposed to have some orthodontic work done, but she refused to send me as she didn't feel I needed my teeth worked on. I wanted to get my driver's license, and was told Foster kids weren't allowed to drive cars. The foster girl in that first foster home drove the family car and drove the farm equipment also. The case manager would make ambiguous statements leaving me to believe that I was going to be reunited with my mom. It was as if they tried to make me have a meltdown so they could justify keeping me on unnecessary medications.

They tried to take my driver's license from me. They had no clue how to help me so they kept me medicated, and waited for me to turn 18 so that they could put me in an assisted living place so that I could get on welfare. They went so far as to drug me and then give me an IQ test so they could say I was mentally retarded.

I called protection and advocacy and no one returned my calls. I had a reporter who wanted to do a story on me and children's services said I'd get in trouble if I talked to the reporter. They refused to let me tell my story. They got really mad when my letter to the editor got published. I was threatened and I believe my mom was threatened also.

If I could help other kids that are suffering at the hands of neglectful agencies such as the ones who abused me, I would ask that North Dakota first finds a way to categorize us by our unique challenges. Clumping us all together and treating us as juvenile delinquents is wrong. Not finding appropriate facilities to help us is wrong. Agencies that are unprepared, complacent or unwilling to find help for us kids are also wrong. Allowing agencies to put themselves above the law, lie in court or threaten people because their poor care was exposed should never happen. Policies should be for the best interests of the children not for the convenience of the agency. If you help us as children, we will grow up to be contributing adults, if you drug us and stuff us in homes without teaching us any skills, we learn to suck off welfare for the rest of our lives. The decisions you make will determine our success.