

Testimony for the SUBCOMMITTEE on HEALTH AND HOSPITALS

I am grateful to have the opportunity to tell you about inclusion teaming, an after school program devoted to solely social learning and job development. We provide places where young people can learn about the differences they see among themselves every day and gain skills for communicating beyond their differences. Young people with social communication challenges want a chance to practice social skills with their peers, and young people with typical patterns of communication want to have meaningful community service opportunities with them. I knew that would be the perfect match for healing the suffering resulting from intolerance by others.

My name is Catherine Hogan, and for years I have worked with special needs children, as a school social worker, an assistant school administrator, a supervising clinician at the Yale Child Study Center, and an educational advocate. Having worn all these hats, I gained experience seeing a school problem through a multiple lens. The most painful problems were the difficulties experienced by vulnerable youth. These young people were often bright with social communications challenges associated with an autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit disorder, or a learning disability. Vulnerable youth don't have the skills to get connected, and they either become the easy targets of bullies or become desperately isolated, sitting alone at a lunch table, day after day. Sometimes, these young people quit school; sometimes they endure the pain, or so it appears, until loss of life in some form occurs.

In April 1999, I was president of the Connecticut Association of School Social Workers; that is when tragic loss of life took place at Columbine. We spoke then about gun control and anti-bullying laws. We've tried a myriad of character development programs. One of the things we learned over those years was that it was difficult for vulnerable youth to practice social skills, to grow, to feel confident in environments that continued to feel risky to them.

With a fear of safety, the talents of vulnerable youth often remain hidden and invisible to others, hurting not only their progress but depriving society of the benefits of their abilities. As it stands now, the unemployment rate for these young people is extraordinarily high. Most importantly, the risk for mental health disorders increases based on the level and duration of isolation they may encounter.

In 2010, Inclusion Teaming opened its doors to become a here and now action plan that brings young people with social communication challenges and their peers with typical communications together to: appreciate each other gifts, ensure improved preparation for the workplace, and to explore creative job possibilities. Additionally, we offer a safety net for children with untreated or developing mental health disorders. We are creating a mental health team that would help get some applicants ready to participate in ^{our} on-work. During

instruction, Inclusion Teaming offers an emotionally corrective experience to young people who are bullied or isolated simply because of their differences. Ultimately, both groups, those with social communication challenges and those with typical social communications develop a lifetime ability to communicate effectively in school, community, and workplace settings.

We believe that funding will help us expand our work, improve outcomes for young people with social communication challenges, and provide advanced skill levels for young people who have typical communications. Today, you will hear from some of our participants who will tell you what Inclusion Teaming has done for them and how it can help all students. You will also read testimony about the value of our work from those who could not attend but sent emails to the CDG appropriations testimony link.

Inclusion Teaming is working diligently to collaborate with experts and to incorporate the first hand experience of parents, to improve the growing problem of bright youth who have limited knowledge or even no knowledge on how to understand each other. They become motivated and excited by what they learn and they want to bring it back to their friends and get their friends to join too.

In summary, we provide transition skills to vulnerable special needs youth, and advanced communication skills for youth who want to work with all kinds of bright minds.

Catherine A. Hogan, MSW, LCSW, Founder Inclusion Teaming, New Haven CT February 15, 2013