

Testimony for the Subcommittee on Health and Hospitals

My name is Catherine Sharafanowich and I live in Milford. Thank you for your listening ears today.

By profession, I am a pharmacist. Today, I speak on behalf of Inclusion Teaming both as the parent of a young teen on the autism spectrum, and an employer.

On a daily basis at home, I see the need to connect-the-dots of verbal and non-verbal communication with my son. As an employer, the communication skills of staff directly impact healthcare delivery and customer service.

There is a reason why isolation is used as punishment; we are social creatures who thrive in supportive community. Where differences in communication styles lead to isolation, Inclusion Teaming teaches skills that can prevent untold pain.

Non-typical communicators have the same need and desire for friendship and participation as their peers. Both benefit from understanding different perspectives and communication styles.

I was touched by the story of a typical communicator who was part of the pilot program for Inclusion Teaming in high school. At college, he noted a student in the dorm who was not a typical communicator and spent most of his time alone, or on the social periphery. Because of his experiences with the Inclusion Teaming program, this young man knew how to reach out, connect with the student, and bring him into the daily community activities of the dorm. This is just one example of how one student's new skills has already impacted many lives.

Inclusion Teaming enhances the abilities of typical communicators to understand and work with other communication styles – a tremendous advantage in the multicultural workplace and in our communities.

Inclusion Teaming is a way to tap into the intelligence and perspective that non-typical communicators bring to the table.

One phrase I remember from a marriage preparation seminar is, "Where two people always agree, one of them is unnecessary". Inclusion Teaming teaches skills to work through inevitable differences and conflict.

We have too many examples of young people lashing out in anger. Inclusion Teaming promotes understanding and respect for differences while providing the tools and practice needed for fundamental change in social dynamics.

I have known Catherine Hogan for over 10 years and respect her integrity and vision. I serve on the Board of Directors of Inclusion Teaming because this program is desperately needed to support the growing number of non-typical communicators who will be leaving the structure and support of the school environment as they become adults and find their place in the world. They have much to contribute.

To quote Margaret Mead, "Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has."

Inclusion Teaming has documented and sustained positive outcomes; is scalable and reproducible, and has a core group of dedicated supporters.

Help us to be agents of change.

Catherine Sharafanowich

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