

Hello, my name is Jade Christensen, I live in Wilsonville, Oregon. I'm speaking today on behalf of our son, who is Autistic, he will be 6 in April. Our son is home full time with me. My role as his Mother and caregiver is to help him navigate a world that expects disabled people to appear more neurotypical in order to be allowed a seat at the table. I believe the opposite to be true. When we learned of his neurotype, our family did everything in our power to understand how he experiences life so we could mold our home and life to accommodate him.

When our son qualified for services through Clackamas County Disability two years ago, determinations were made about the amount of support hours he qualified for. I was hopeful for help and support for him, so he would be able to receive care in his most favorite and safest environment, his home.

Finding an in-home caregiver has been incredibly hard. It took us a year and a half to find a caregiver and when we finally did find a caregiver, they were able to fulfill 9 hours out of the 194 hours we have for the month.

Having a caregiver in our home was a point of anxiety and frustration for our son. After 3 months of trying, it became evident that this new support was actually making our lives harder, especially our sons. I ended up still continuing the majority of the support because of his very specific behavioral requirements while his caregiver was here. We decided to end care. It took a further 3 months to recover and come back to baseline after that experience.

Since then, I have continued to fill in that role as "paid caregiver", above and beyond typical expected parenting duties, with all the love, respect, determination and consideration for our boy. I am not able to work as a result of the care I provide him. Our day usually starts at 4:45 AM and goes till 9 PM. He requires daily living support as well as constant coregulation to keep him feeling safe and grounded.

I share our story with you, with the current existence of an in-home caregiver program only reaching its goal of supporting disabled children if the hours are able to be used.

Currently, there is an extremely qualified, dedicated, tender, and willing caregiver available. One who shows up everyday, on time, willing to continually learn and grow in their skills to improve the outcome of our son. A caregiver that doesn't cancel the morning of a scheduled shift. A caregiver that knows exactly what to do when our son starts flopping his body around and curls up in a ball around his blanket on the floor, repeating the phrase, "we get to go see Mommy, wheeeee".

When our son repeats that phrase, he is asking for his Mommy.