

Portland State University
Senate Bill 572
Submitted by Kathy Russo
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I have a wonderful 26 year old son who has autism. Since birth professionals have told us what he would not be capable of. He has proven them wrong at every turn. They based their opinions on what was available for people like my son. All the obstacles in their path to adulthood and independence.

Programs like the one at Portland State University are changing that paradigm. The only program of its kind in the state of Oregon, the Career and Community Studies Program at PSU, showed my son who he could become.

He took college classes with other young people. He had seminars and cohorts and social events with a wide diversity of people. He was asked his opinion and asked to speak up. For the first time he found his voice and felt he had something of value to contribute. He saw a future for himself that he could mold and develop and make into whatever he wanted.

70% of adults on the autism spectrum are unemployed or underemployed. Most live with their parents, family or a social support group home. That could have been my son's fate.

After interning with Portland State's Football program, marketing team, and the Rec center through the CCS career path at PSU he was ready to hold a job and launch a career. Upon graduation he interviewed with NIKE in Beaverton and landed his dream job working for the market leaders of footwear.

With four years of self reliance and self advocacy taught through the PSU program he was ready to try living independently. He now lives in his own apartment cooking and cleaning and managing his own space.

Most importantly, he has realized he has something to give to his community. He has value and his voice can be heard. He has started a YouTube channel where he brings awareness to the neurodivergent community and dispels stereotypes with amazing stories and individuals.

This program was essential to my son's view of himself and of where he fits into the world. It has made him a valuable contributor to our society and a joyful human.

Everybody should have the opportunity to find their own light and share it with the world. This program at PSU does exactly that. Please support Senate Bill 572 and fund access to post secondary education for all humans experiencing intellectual disabilities. It's the right thing to do for all of us.

Thank you
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