

Interview: Caitlin Heiner, Parent - Kimberly, Idaho

What made you decide to apply for Partners?

I've had a long-standing interest in politics, and that increased after I had my daughter. I saw a need for more advocacy and change that has to be made when it comes to children and others with disabilities, whether that be politically, medically, or in the community.

What made you keep coming back?

Part of me was a little bit jarred because it started with such a controversial bang from the first speaker. At the same time, I had already learned so much just in the 1st session. Part of me knew that even if every session was just like this, it was a wealth of information. At the same time it was good for me to see the other points of view.

What's one of the main things that you learned through Partners?

I learned about navigating the service system and the DD programs, learned more about being self-sufficient as an adult with a disability, and how to approach legislators, draft bills, and make your voice heard in a larger capacity.

What was your favorite session?

My favorite session was learning about the history of individuals with disabilities and how they were treated in the past. This was something I had explored on my own before, but learned considerably more at Partners. It was shocking to me how this was so recent—that this wasn't 100 or 200 years ago, but 40 or 50 years ago! We have already made significant strides in how we treat people, but there is so much more to learn and to change. It's surprising that people who lived through it had no idea what was going on.

What are you going to tell people when you recruit for the 2019/2020 Partners session?

That this is absolutely something everyone should go through if you are a person with a disability or have a person with a disability in your life. It's a wealth of invaluable information and you will make connections and friendships that will help you along the way. Partners is the fastest and best way to learn just about everything you will need on this journey!

How will you use Partner in the future?

I'm already using it—in IEP's, to organize a community event, and helping friends navigate the service system. I also plan on using it in future political endeavors in making changes for our community.

Do you think you are a different person because of Partners?

Yes. I feel like it is life changing. I feel more informed, more hopeful, more understanding. I feel I wouldn't have gotten this information otherwise. I feel hopeful because I met self-advocates and they showed me that they have wonderful lives, that they have successful jobs and close friends and that it is what I want for my daughter.