

My story begins when I was born prematurely and had seizures. I started school with Special Education classes. I had to have speech classes to help with some letters I could not pronounce well. The seizures lasted until I was 11 years old, and in middle school, when I was taken off of my seizure medications, due to them stopping as quickly as they had started.

I lost my father when I was 12, due to some heart problems that he had. We lived in Arizona at the time, and then moved back to Michigan in time for me to start High School. My mother raised myself and my older Brother by herself, and I believe her strength gave me the will to fight for the life that I have now! The high school had evaluated me and found that I qualified for some college prep classes, which was a surprise to my mom and myself. I knew inside somehow that I needed to work extra hard to show everyone, (but most of all myself) that I could make it through high school and graduate. I did work hard, leaving school dances and other things to others to enjoy.

I read everything I could get my hands on, read my homework over and over until I understood it. I was happy and proud of my advocating for myself (even though I did not know that's what it was called at that time), and graduating with my class, even being able to have my senior year as 2 hours shared time at my local community college and 1 elective class.

I had tried to work during the next 5 years and found it difficult to keep a job. I applied for and received social security disability. I received the payments until I had found a full-time job at Peckham, Inc. and worked my allotted amount of trial work period that they allowed. I worked as a Sewing Machine Operator from December 2005, until March of 2009, when I was hired into the Customer Service job I have now. I was chosen to be a part of what was then (2007) called, The Leadership Council in Charlotte, Michigan (now known as the Peckham Self-Advocacy Team or P.S.A.T.). I have held offices in the P.S.A.T. over the years: Secretary, President and currently Vice-President.

I have met several elected officials; been to the Lansing, Michigan Capital building; Helped plan and build handicapped grilling areas at Potter Park Zoo in Lansing, Mi; also planned, fundraised for helped to add a Wheelchair swing to another park in Lansing, Mi; advocated for co-workers and others in the community; volunteered for many events (Governors inauguration, Peckham speakers events, etc.); voters registration events; and doing fun things to raise money for chosen charities Just to name a few!

Thank You so much for the opportunity to share with you my story of advocacy and helping others. I'm happy to have learned Leadership skills to assist me in the Future.

**Laura D.
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