

Public Testimony Benjamin DeVorss

My name is Ben DeVorss from Toledo Ohio.

I am reading this to tell you a little bit about myself and what I do in life. First of all, I am an Eagle Scout that reached that achievement in 2005. I work at Bittersweet Farms as an employee there under the Autism spectrum. I just wanted to let you know how important it is for people like me who have Autism to be a part of this community and how some people like me who cannot express their opinions like I can. First of all, for people like me or around my I.Q. level, whether it being less or more on the scale to be able to work as independently with some assistance for those who need guidance at work and in life, because I feel like some of my co-workers at my job in Whitehouse Ohio who can't express their feelings or opinions about what they are capable of in general makes it hard for people like them to understand why it is necessary for people with autism to feel like they are as special and as important as any other individual in the United States.

I have been teased and hit by other people and been taken advantage of by doing things for other people so they can get what they want from me in my life. That is why I feel safe at Bittersweet Farms, because the people at Bittersweet are nothing but nice and friendly to me since I feel safe at Bittersweet with all the residents who live there. Ever since I've been teased and treated poorly in my life by, when I walked into Bittersweet, I knew I was in good hands. I felt like the people there were understanding and knew me for who I was, rather than take advantage of me and tease me like the people in the past that I was around did. The people at Bittersweet were very friendly and appreciative for all the work that I did for them, and it made a difference in my life. It was a turn-around compared to the people in the past who did not understand me and took advantage of me. So it really means a lot if I were in housing at Bittersweet where the staff and individuals are always excited to see me and smiling and shaking my hand. It really made me feel good deep down with all these people who understand my feelings and emotions towards other people. I feel really comfortable in an environment such as Bittersweet Farms and hope that I can live where I am safe from being hit or teased verbally.

I want to say the Bittersweet Farms residents are like family to me, as well as my friends. I respect all of the individuals who live there and care about all of my friends, because they make me feel welcome from my home to theirs. I really enjoy doing respite at Bittersweet Farms and I am hoping that I can be brought into their family, just like if I were temporarily living there as a respite resident. I have a lot of people there who cannot socialize the way that I can and express their feelings the same way that I can.

I enjoy working at Bittersweet Farms during their weekly day hab program. I work in a greenhouse and a kitchen, and enjoy going to a dog kennel to play and volunteer to help with the dogs that attend doggie daycare there. I work at a kitchen too, called a Nock Kitchen to make Tomato Chutney and Pesto to sell at our farm, and I really enjoy helping with that as well. I also enjoy helping my greenhouse staff during the warm months with the CSA program by helping load organic produce we harvest from our own greenhouses to give to other people who sign up

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to receive this produce we harvest and grow in our hoop houses. I also volunteer at Seagate to help people who cannot afford groceries and need the help from us to give them the groceries to help them. We also deliver the CSA boxes to Seagate too to help in the same predicament that we do to help with the groceries. But mostly I am concerned for the people who are calm, understanding, and very friendly to be around.

I have been on a waiting list for housing since 2002 to get housing and am hoping to get housing at Bittersweet Farms very soon because I think I can adapt to the friends/family that is very understanding to the individuals who have different levels of Autism. It would be unfair to take the will of farm residency away from the individuals who need the help and support from the staff that work to help the residents with the skills and special needs that the residents have to continue helping the residents out. The staff that do work at Bittersweet Farms both day and night are very nice and very understanding and know everything about the levels of those who have Autism. The staff always have flexibility and have special projects during the day hab program for the individuals who either live there, or come to work during the weekly day hab program to do different activities/jobs.

I hope that this makes a difference to those who need the help and support at Bittersweet Farms and really would like to continue working at Bittersweet Farms and hopefully live there as soon as possible. The farmstead means a lot to both me and the other people who attend and live at Bittersweet Farms and would make a difference if the farm can continue its day hab program and serve the individuals who need all the support that they can receive.

I am very disappointed and upset that there are laws that took away my possible entry into housing at Bittersweet Farms where I can communicate and interact with the people who live there. Unfortunately, I can't understand why someone would decide to make an impossible difference in Ohio for people with disabilities like me. This was a golden moment for me, as well as many of other individuals who will not receive proper benefits and waivers.

I have some people, referring back to my job that can't function the way I do and can't really express their thoughts, opinions. Some are suffering with illnesses that could be deadly like I am. My job at Bittersweet is to be there, as my goal, to help assist people who can't understand either how to do their job independently, or struggling over rough times in their life.

Please help me and Bittersweet as best as you can with the funding because I really want to live at Bittersweet and continue to do the activities there that I do now.

Thank you!