

Kathleen M. May
11421 Popes Head Road
Fairfax, Virginia 22030

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To Whom It May Concern:

My son had the good fortune to benefit from Cathy Thornton's exceptional array of skills for 8 years. She was his primary teacher and case manager throughout his elementary school years and, though she no longer served as his primary case manager, she moved to middle school with his class and continued to have direct daily contact with him and to influence his education and training.

Cathy has an excellent understanding of child development, both normal and atypical. She has an intuitive ability to tune into the individual needs of a child and develop a rapport with them that enables her to tap into the child's special talents and skills and to capitalize on them to help maximize the child's potential.

When my own son first entered her classroom he came from a situation that had deteriorated to a point that left him unsettled and insecure. He had challenging behaviors in addition to cognitive and intellectual disabilities. Cathy recognized that the first thing she needed to do was to work on his self-esteem and improve his confidence. She told us "My job is to find ways to make Sam successful and happy in his life. He will have many negative experiences to deal with. I will help him find the positive experiences to celebrate".

During six years with her in elementary school she helped him develop skills to deal with his anxiety and his anger. She also taught him academic skills and exposed him to a variety of social opportunities. She created a whole person.

By the time he moved to middle school he had a good basis for continuing his academic experience. There she helped him explore more social opportunities. For example, when he showed an interest in running for student government she supported him and volunteered as a mentor for the SGA so that she could provide his accommodations there. She also helped his new teacher understand his learning, and communication style so that the teacher could work most effectively with him.

Today, Sam is a happy and confident high school student who focuses on a mix of academic, work, and life skills training. He has developed and uses strategies for managing his anxiety and other behaviors most of the time. He still has a relationship with Ms. Thornton and her husband and enjoys meeting them for dinner occasionally. He has benefited greatly from the long term relationship and the stability of a friendship in his life.

Cathy is able to relate well to young children and people with disabilities and truly enjoys and values their friendship. She is dedicated, enthusiastic and creative. Her skills as a teacher, mentor and friend have helped Sam develop into a young man with a bright future.

Kathy May